



BLUE^{AND} GRAY WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

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No. 28.

NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 17, 1905.

Price 5 Cents.

TURNING THE TIDE; OR, THE BOYS IN GRAY ON TIME.

By LIEUT HARRY LEE.



"Stop that girl's screams!" yelled Hanley as he tightened his grip on the farmer's throat. One of the deserters tried to push Eva into the closet. But the house door flew open and soldiers in Gray appeared in the nick of time.

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TURNING THE TIDE;

OR,

The Boys in Gray On Time.

By LIEUT. HARRY LEE.

CHAPTER I.

THE AMBUSH.

"Let me take your glass, Captain Prentiss. I think I can see signs of the raiders over by that knoll."

The speaker was a handsome youth, dressed in the uniform of a Confederate lieutenant. His name was Fred Randolph, and the youth whom he addressed as Captain Prentiss was his bosom friend.

At the outbreak of the great Civil War a band of Richmond boys had organized an independent company of volunteers to fight for the Confederacy.

Will Prentiss, the son of Colonel Jeff Prentiss, of General Lee's staff, had been elected captain. Fred Randolph, his chum and friend, was named first lieutenant.

With great credit the company, known as the Richmond or Virginia Grays, had served through the early battles of the Peninsula.

Now Lee was making his northward advance to pass through Maryland on his famous sortie.

The Grays were elected to go in advance of one of Ewell's columns as scouts. They had been especially instructed to look out for Union raiders.

So it happened that at the noon hour, while the Grays

were in bivouac near by, the two young officers had climbed a hill to scan the country for signs of the foe.

Will Prentiss passed the field glass to his companion.

Lieutenant Randolph took it, and for some moments scanned the distant spot, where he thought he had detected the color of a Union uniform.

He quickly saw that his eyes had not deceived him.

Just on the verge of a little clump of trees, nearly two miles away, a party of Union soldiers were stationed.

With the powerful glass Fred could easily see them as they lounged about on the greensward. He saw rows of stacked muskets.

It was safe to assume that they, like the Grays, were on a scouting trip. Or, it was possible that they were raiders.

Now, the Grays, when on scout duty, were sent as mounted infantry. They had horses tethered in the woods near by.

The horses of the distant Union company could faintly be seen in the trees.

"There they are," said Fred, handing the glass to Will.

"You can see for yourself."

The young captain took a look at them.

"I don't believe they are raiders."

"Why?"

"Well, they wear too good uniforms. Raiders generally are line cavalymen and dress rough."

"Then you think they are mounted infantry?"

"I do."

"You may be right," said Fred. "But what are we to do about it?"

"Cultivate their acquaintance."

"Do you mean attack them?"

"Perhaps so! It is part of our business to disperse any scouting as well as raiding party. I think we can do it."

"All right. Give us the orders and we will move on," said Fred.

"There seems to be no hurry. We will wait until we see them move."

"You don't think they suspect our presence here, do you?"

"I don't."

"Very good. Suppose we wait for them to come along?" suggested Fred.

"That is a good plan, and we will do so," replied Will.

"We can then arrange a neat little ambush."

The boys sat down in the shade of a small tree to watch the distant troop. It was not long before they saw a stir in the grove of trees.

The Union infantry were mounting. Presently lines of horses came out into view. The faint sounds of a bugle were heard.

"It's all right," said Will Prentiss. "They are coming this way. We will wait for them."

"Waylay them, as it were!"

"Yes."

The boys now descended to the scene of the bivouac. With a few quick, sharp orders the Virginia Grays soon fell into line.

Then they were marched up the highway to the brow of a little eminence. The party of Union scouts would pass that way, so Will Prentiss planned to lie in wait for them.

From a nearby covert the young captain of the Grays watched the approaching foe.

Nearer they came, their horses ambling along.

"By jingo!" said Fred Randolph, "they are a handsome company. It seems almost too bad to fire upon them."

"There is no sentiment in war," said Will Prentiss. "They would do the same by us."

"Oh, of course they would."

Nearer drew the Union troop. Now the young Confederate captain gave the low-spoken order:

"Ready! Aim!" The guns of the Grays were leveled through the underbrush at the oncoming troop. Then came the quick order:

"Fire!"

A sheet of flame leaped from the muzzles of the muskets. The crash of the volley shook the air.

Horses and men went down in a heap. The others were thrown into great confusion.

The sharp orders of the Union captain could be heard as he deployed his men.

They were dismounted quickly and the horses were gal-

loped to the rear. In the cover of a sunken roadway they took up their station.

Will's boys now were ready for another volley. The Union soldiers were already firing rapidly.

But just at this moment, and as Will was getting ready to give the order to charge, a startling thing happened.

It was one of the regular scouts who came rushing up and cried:

"We've got to get out of here just as quick as we can. It's all up with us!"

"What's that?" cried Will. "What do you mean?"

"Look yonder! There's five times our number coming up to flank us."

Will Prentiss saw a swarm of blue-clad soldiers coming along the ridge a few hundred yards away. Already they fired a heavy volley, but it fortunately went over the heads of the Grays.

Quick as a flash Will made action. He gave a quick order:

"Fall back in order! Mount!"

The horses were rushed forward, and the boys sprung to saddle. They were not a moment too soon.

The Union troops, with a loud cheer, were rushing down upon them. They would have been prisoners in a short time.

But now, so quickly had all been done, the Grays wheeled and dashed away with a ringing cheer of defiance. In a few moments they were beyond musket shot.

"Well," cried Fred Randolph, as he rode along beside the young captain, "that's what you call a close shave! They came near getting us, didn't they?"

"I should say they did."

"I thought it was all up with us."

"So did I."

"Do you think we had better risk going further until Ewell and his division comes up?"

Will looked at his young lieutenant curiously for a moment. Then he asked:

"You haven't forgotten our orders, have you?"

"We are to burn the old plantation house of old Steve Warley for the assistance he gave to the Yankees."

"That is it, exactly."

"But—are we anywhere near his place?"

"I don't think it is more than two miles west of here. We will shake off this detachment of Yankees and then ride over there."

Fred Randolph turned in his saddle and looked back.

"I'm sort of curious."

"How is that?"

"I'd like to know why the Union soldiers are in such force in this particular locality. I supposed that Pope had retreated toward Washington."

"So he has!" declared Will. "But there are still plenty of detached brigades and cavalry regiments scattered around here to bother us. No doubt it is a detachment of Porter's division."

"Oh, I see! All right, captain. We will carry out our orders."

The Grays had now put a goodly distance between them and their foes. It had been, indeed, a fortunate thing that they were in possession of horses.

Leaving the ridge, they now struck into a road which led westward.

It was a well traveled highway, and led toward the distant heights of the Shenandoah mountains.

This region was occupied by well-to-do farmers. The fertile lands had enriched the most of them. Some were loyal to the Confederacy, but there were many Union partisans.

Among these latter who yet remained loyal to the Stars and Stripes was a prosperous owner of a plantation named Stephen Warley.

Ordinarily he had been a very popular man in the community. But his failure to join the adherents of the Confederacy had aroused much feeling.

Moreover, he had actually been discovered in the act of furnishing the Union scouts with information.

This was not to be pardoned. General Ewell had given Will Prentiss orders to visit Warley's home and burn it to the ground.

"We ought to hang the traitor!" he declared. "But we will burn his home, which will be hard punishment."

So Will was bound to execute this mission. The Grays galloped on now at a faster gait. They soon came to forks in the road.

The road to the left led over to Warley's plantation. So the Grays took that road.

But just as they turned a bend in the road at a point where it was heavily wooded they came upon a solitary horseman.

For an instant there seemed danger of a collision. The horseman pulled his horse upon its haunches, and with one glance started to speed away.

But in that instant Will Prentiss saw that he wore a blue uniform.

He knew at once that he was a Union soldier, perhaps a despatch bearer. Instantly the boy captain sent up a yell: "Stop him! Catch him! Don't let him get away!"

The Grays, with a furious yell, spurred their horses forward. The young Union lieutenant, for such he was, rode madly.

For a moment it seemed as if he would succeed. But only for a moment. Then a thrilling thing happened.

One of the Grays raised his musket and took aim at the Union soldier's horse. The gun spoke sharply.

The aim was perfect, for the horse lunged, reeled, and went down in a heap. The young Union lieutenant was thrown in the dust of the roadway.

He was upon his feet instantly. But the Confederate boys were all about him like a swarm of bees.

"I surrender!" he cried.

At once Will gave sharp orders to his men to fall back. He rode forward and accosted the prisoner.

He saw that he was a youth of about his own age and handsome and noble in appearance. He wore the insignia of a lieutenant.

"Do you carry despatches?" asked Will, sharply, as he scrutinized him.

"If I did I would not answer that question," replied the youth.

"Who are you?"

"I am Lieutenant Maynell, of the First Rhode Island Volunteers."

"Ah! I am Captain Will Prentiss, of the Virginia Grays. I shall see that you have the courteous treatment due your rank. But I want you to tell me the truth. Do you carry despatches?"

"I refuse to answer."

"Then we shall be compelled to search you."

Will descended from his horse, and several of the Grays did the same.

By Will's orders Sergeant Spotswood now advanced and proceeded to search the person of the Union lieutenant.

The result was that from an inner pocket he drew a bundle of papers. Will scanned them closely, and made a startling discovery.

They were despatches from General Porter, and concerned the planning of an ambush for Ewell's men. At once the young captain saw that an important capture had been made.

"I am sorry, Lieutenant Maynell," he said, quietly, "but we shall have to hold you as a prisoner of war. These despatches will be in General Ewell's hands within an hour."

The young lieutenant was very pale, and apparently dejected, but he said:

"These are the fortunes of war. But for a little deed of philanthropy I would not have been caught."

"Ah!" exclaimed Will. "How is that?"

"I will tell you," said Maynell. "In our regiment at Cedar Mountain was a young Virginian of the loyal class. His name was Harold Warley. He was mortally wounded, and asked me to carry his last words to his folks, who live but a half mile from here. I was just coming from there."

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Will. "You refer to Stephen Warley?"

"Yes."

"Ah! We are bound for his place. We have orders to burn it about his ears."

Maynell gave a sharp cry.

"Surely, you'll not do that! It would be barbarous. He is a harmless non-combatant."

"Our general thinks not. He knows that he has been giving the enemy information."

"I know that to be false!" cried Maynell. "All the information obtained in this locality I have obtained myself."

"Oh! Then the planter Warley is a friend and former acquaintance of yours?"

CHAPTER II.

DISOBEDIENCE OF ORDERS.

The despatch bearer, for such the young lieutenant was, held up his hands.

"Certainly. I visited his plantation before the war. Harold Warley and I were friends. I trust, captain, you will spare this inoffensive planter."

Will shook his head.

"I am sorry," he said, "but my orders are very imperative. Fall in with the rear. Sergeant Spotswood, mount him on a spare horse. Forward, march!"

The prisoner was quickly mounted, and the cavalcade rode on. The road now came out from among the trees and the open fields were seen.

A short distance ahead the plantation buildings were seen. In all that region there was no fairer spot.

The Warley plantation was one of the best in that part of Virginia. As the Grays now turned into the hedge-bordered lane that led up to the house Will could not help but notice how well kept the place was.

Up to the door of the grand old mansion they rode. On the porch sat a man of portly build, with a handsome face and a bearing of dignity becoming to his sixty-odd years.

Beside him sat a young girl, who started up in apparent alarm at sight of the Grays. As Will gazed upon her he thought that he had never seen greater beauty.

She was Kate Warley, the daughter of the planter. Her face grew deadly pale and her gaze seemed fixed on Maynell.

Will saw the quick glances between the two, and instantly guessed the truth, that they were lovers. He now understood well why Maynell had deviated from his road to call at the Warley home.

The planter had sprung up and come down the porch steps.

He met Will's gaze fairly and spoke in a genial way.

"Ah, captain, to what do we owe the honor of this visit?"

"Can you not guess, Mr. Warley?" replied the young captain. "You are known to be a Northern sympathizer."

"Ah!" said the planter. "I am a non-combatant and claim the immunity of such."

"I have orders from General Ewell to warn you to leave this part of the country at once. I am also ordered to destroy your buildings as retaliation for your conduct in carrying information to the foe."

Warley seemed to be struck speechless. He stared at Will and became white to the lips.

"You have come here to burn my buildings," he exclaimed. "That is infamous."

"It is General Ewell's orders."

"Ewell is a pirate. I am a Southern gentleman and this is a free country. I have a right to do as I please."

Will bowed respectfully.

"I am sorry, Mr. Warley, but I am bound to obey orders."

"You will not dare to!" cried the planter, angrily. "If this is the way you Confederates are going to treat people you will lose the sympathy of every fair-minded Southerner."

"I am very sorry," said the young captain. "I will give you time to remove your effects."

"I will do nothing of the kind!" stormed the planter.

"You and your gang may take yourselves away from here as soon as you can. You are trespassing."

"It is evident you know very little of the usages of war," said Will.

"It matters not what I know. I don't propose to have a young upstart like you come here and burn my buildings, not for a whim of General Ewell or any other general. I shall personally resist you to the last drop of blood I own."

"Oh, papa!" said Kate Warley, coming down from the porch, "I don't believe they are regular troops. They are guerillas."

Her face was very pale, and her eyes were all the while fixed upon Lieutenant Maynell, the prisoner.

Will Prentiss' heart smote him. He did not at all relish the task.

Burning of buildings or sacking of houses was not to his liking. He could not look upon it as warfare.

He knew that stern means are sometimes necessary in case of war to enforce military law. But, as he looked at the planter and his beautiful daughter and then at the magnificent home, he could not bring himself to think it just or right.

The day was rapidly drawing to a close. Will knew that they must bivouac somewhere for the night.

An idea occurred to him.

"Mr. Warley," he said, "I confess to you that I do not believe in the destruction of homes. This is a task which it is very hard for me to bring myself to execute. I am going to see if there is not some way I can legally and honorably evade it."

The planter's face changed.

"That is the way to talk," he cried. "You look like an honorable young man. I think you are fair-minded."

"I hope so," declared Will. "I shall at least wait until morning before executing the order. With your permission, I will bivouac my men on your grounds."

"You may do so," agreed the planter. "I will furnish you grain for your horses and something for your men. Yourself and your officers shall be my guests. As for your prisoner——"

The planter ceased speaking. His gaze had met Will's.

"I know," said the young captain. "He has just come from here. He is your friend."

"A school friend of my daughter's. He brought me news of my son's death."

Will turned and looked at Maynell a moment. He knew well the high character of these people. He was taking no chances in trusting to their honor.

So he said:

"Lieutenant Maynell, I will accept your parole while here. I feel sure you will not break it."

The young Union officer's face flushed with joy. He flashed a glance at the young girl, and then replied:

"I am deeply honored, captain, and I can assure you that the privilege will never be abused."

The Grays were extremely glad to bivouac, it need hardly be said, and very quickly the horses were stabled and the boys proceeded to make themselves comfortable.

The negroes brought grain, and also fine flitches of bacon for the soldiers. Soon a dozen camp fires were burning.

Will Prentiss and Fred Randolph were invited to dine with the planter. They entered the great mansion, and were impressed with the magnificent furnishings.

Kate Warley seemed to be in an exceedingly vivacious mood now, and did all in her power to entertain the guests.

The two young Confederate officers became the recipients of most marked attention. Lieutenant Maynell himself aided in this.

It was as if no state of war existed or there was no division of sympathies. Will took a great liking to Maynell, whom he found to be a fine fellow.

The dinner which the planter gave the young officers was a feast indeed. It was served in grand style.

After it was over they repaired to the great drawing-room, where Kate furnished entertainment by singing. She had a fine contralto voice.

Truly, Will and Fred felt that they had struck a congenial place. In all their long marches through Virginia they had never met with hospitality like this.

Lieutenant Maynell also sang in a rich tenor. As Will could sing baritone and Fred had a fine bass voice, the big house resounded with patriotic songs.

The strains of "Maryland, My Maryland" floated out upon the night air, and the Boys in Gray took it up. It was a late hour when they retired.

For the first time in many weeks, Will and Fred slept in a bed. But they were early astir the next morning and present at roll call of the company.

It was sometime later that Stephen Warley came out leisurely and saluted the young captain.

"I say, Prentiss," he said, "you can see that there is no necessity of burning my house. If Ewell was here I'd soon convince him."

Will held up his hand.

"Have no fear, friend Warley!" he said. "I have no intention of burning your house. If General Ewell wants to do it, let him come down here and order it done."

Will spoke resolutely. He was deeply in earnest. He did not believe that Ewell knew the exact state of affairs.

In any event, he saw no reason why he should burn the beautiful mansion, even though the owner might not be loyal, and he was determined not to do so.

It might be disobedience of orders, but the captain felt that it would be better to err this way than to commit a great wrong.

CHAPTER III.

A SUDDEN ATTACK.

Will had sent a detachment with the captured despatches to General Ewell. He was bound to wait here for the return of the courier.

The Grays were nothing loth to remain at the plantation.

They were getting a much-needed rest and plenty to eat, two things which are bound to interest a soldier as much as anything else.

But the young captain had taken the precaution to establish a good picket line.

He knew that he was far out of the line of Ewell's advance. At any moment some superior Union force might appear on the scene.

Will noted one thing which interested him not a little.

This was that the young lieutenant and Kate Warley embraced the opportunity to be constantly together.

Will was of the generous spirit to sympathize with lovers, and he would have been glad to further their happiness all in his power.

But yet there was stern duty confronting him.

Maynell was a prisoner of war. He must be sent to Richmond at the earliest possible moment.

It was possible that he might have the good luck there to be at once exchanged. Otherwise, it might be a long time before he would be able to see Kate Warley again.

Thus Will Prentiss looked upon matters. The morning hours passed, and the boy captain was busy with duties of routine, when an outcry was heard.

The clatter of horses' hoofs broke upon the air.

Into the plantation yard galloped one of the Grays. Will at once recognized him as the courier whom he had sent to Ewell with the despatches.

But the courier was a frightful spectacle. He was clinging to the pommel of his saddle. His head hung low upon his breast.

Blood covered him. His uniform was torn and soiled. His head was bare, and a great gash crossed his scalp.

His face was corpse-like. But he had bravely clung to his horse, and now that his duty was done he tumbled to the ground.

In an instant ready hands seized him, and he was stretched out, while stimulants were pressed between his white lips.

They revived him, and Will Prentiss, kneeling over him, asked:

"Patterson, what does this mean? What has happened to you?"

"Ran into—Union patrol—had fight—got shot—hand-to-hand—sabre cut! Despatches in pocket."

"Bravely done, Patterson!" cried Will. "You deserve much praise."

Then he reached into the wounded man's blouse and drew out a paper. He saw at once that it bore the signature of General Ewell.

"Boys, wash and dress those wounds. See that he has the best of care. It is a brave thing he has done, and——"

"Oh, Captain Prentiss," cried a feminine voice, "I beg of you to bring him into the house. Poor fellow. We will be glad to do all we can for him."

"Thank you, Miss Warley. It is indeed kind of you. Patterson will appreciate it."

The wounded soldier looked up into the young girl's face and said, feebly:

"Thank you, miss! I am only a bit done out. I've lost a little blood, that's all. I shall be all right soon."

Strong arms lifted the young hero and bore him into the house. There all that a young girl's tender solicitude could do for him was done.

Will now read the despatches which Patterson had given him. The first one read thus:

"On White Creek Road.

"My Dear Prentiss: The despatches you have captured are of great importance. They relate to the desperate defence being made by Colonel Jack Barton, who is at the present moment surrounded by the Union troops at Black Gap, five miles from your present position. After you have destroyed the plantation of Warley take your company and at once ride for Black Gap. If you can get there on time I think you can turn the tide and give Barton a chance to slip through and escape. Attack the foe from the rear and I think you will drive them. Be sure and not fail me. Barton is too valuable a man to lose, and he will surely be forced to surrender if you do not execute this order. I have faith in you.

(Signed) "EWELL, General Commanding."

Will Prentiss read this order, it need hardly be said, with great interest.

He was never the one to lose time in obeying an order. But he knit his brows over one sentence of the present order.

This was regarding the burning of the plantation house. There was his superior officer's order in black and white. He saw Mr. Warley a few yards away regarding him.

Will walked up and handed him the despatch.

"Oblige me by reading this, Mr. Warley," he said. "Now, you know as well as I do that it's a soldier's duty to obey orders without question."

Warley read the despatch. He handed it to the boy captain.

"Do you intend to obey that order?" he asked.

"Do you see any way for me to evade it?" asked the boy captain.

"No!"

"Then what shall I do?"

"Burn my house if you think best. But I shall stand in the door and die in its defence. I will fire on you until shot dead, and my ashes shall be mingled with those of my home."

Will Prentiss looked at the fine old mansion, and again his purpose wavered. It was hard, indeed.

But, even as he was trying to solve the problem, a startling thing happened. Distant shots were heard, and the picket came rushing in.

"We are attacked!" he cried. "The enemy have appeared in force down yonder by the highway."

Will saw at once that this was true.

He saw the blue uniforms and the gleam of bayonets. There was no time to lose.

Quickly the Grays fell in and deployed along the line

of hedge which surrounded the grounds. Firing at once began.

Several hot volleys drove the attacking party back. But it became evident to the boy captain that they were greatly outnumbered.

He had no idea of standing his ground and being surrounded. Moreover, he recalled the order of General Ewell to go to the aid of Captain Barton at Black Gap.

"We can never hold against such a superior force," said Fred Randolph, as he came up hurriedly. "I'll bet there's a thousand of them down there."

"Do you think so?"

"I do!"

"Very good," said Will, quietly. "Bring up the horses. Prepare for a retreat."

The bugle sounded the order. Just then Lieutenant Maynell appeared. He was very pale. Will saw that he had just taken leave of Nell on the porch.

"Captain Prentiss, I am here in answer to my parole," he said.

"Lieutenant Maynell," replied Will, "I have sufficient faith in your honor to extend your parole. Mount and ride away with us."

"You will not fire the house?"

"I have not time."

A light of comprehension came into the lieutenant's eyes. He saw that Will had accepted the logical way out of the difficulty.

"You are a gentleman, sir," he said, warmly. "I am your admirer. I wish you success in all your undertakings."

"Thank you," replied Will. "At present all seems to depend upon a successful retreat. We must get out of here lively."

The Grays quickly sprung to saddle. They fired a last volley at the foe.

Kate Warley came rushing down the steps of the porch and cried:

"Captain Prentiss, we thank you for your great kindness. We——"

The sentence was never finished. A volley from the advancing foe swept the lawn. It shattered windows in the house and struck three of the Grays from their horses.

Will's own horse sank beneath a bullet wound. But what was more awful than all else, was to see the beautiful young girl, the daughter of the plantation, scream and throw up her hands.

Blood suffused her fair bosom and spouted through the laces. She fell in a lifeless heap.

Aghast for a moment, none could move. With a hoarse cry of grief and horror, Stephen Warley rushed toward her.

But before he could reach her Maynell, like a madman, had sprung forward and caught her up in his arms.

The Grays, infuriated, rushed forward and fired a volley that hurled the Union advance back temporarily.

Will Prentiss was now bending over the stricken maiden with Maynell. The young lieutenant was frantic.

But Will placed a hand on his arm.

"Be calm!" he said, sternly. "This is no time for nervousness. See! She is not dead! She will live!"

With deft hands, Will Prentiss bared the wound. He saw with practiced eye that it was not a vital part.

The young girl's eyelashes were quivering, and as Will poured the stimulant between her teeth she came to. But it was only to relapse again into unconsciousness.

By this time negro servants had been called by Warley.

They lifted her to carry her into the house. Maynell, ghastly pale, and trembling in every limb, started to follow them.

But with sudden recollection he turned and came back. He saluted and said:

"At your service, captain."

"Maynell," said Will, "you are my prisoner. But I know your agony of spirit. I have sufficient faith in you to grant you that which I would not in some. I extend your parole and give you permission to remain here until assured that she is out of danger. Then you will at once seek me at Black Gap and report to me there."

Maynell grasped Will's hand with almost maudlin joy.

"God bless you, Captain Prentiss!" he cried. "It is hard to realize that we are foes. I can only assure you of my word of honor to obey your instructions."

"All right, sir. Good-by!" cried Will. Then to his men: "Mount, boys! Give them a last volley!"

This was done. The Grays were quickly in saddle and riding away.

There had been an effort to cut off their retreat by the rear, but the Grays charged through the opposing line.

In a few moments they were speeding down a lane which led to the fields beyond. The foe were not mounted, and could not pursue.

When well assured that they were beyond pursuit the Grays drew rein. At that moment they were upon a little eminence.

From this point they could look back upon the plantation and behold an astounding spectacle.

CHAPTER IV.

AT FARMER LAWTON'S.

It was indeed a thrilling sight which the Grays beheld, and it taught them how narrow had been their escape.

Long lines of blue were seen winding up the highway to the home of Stephen Warley.

What they had fancied a regiment they now saw was a whole brigade. If they had not got out just as they did they would have been captured.

"Whew!" exclaimed Sergeant Spotswood, as he reined in his horse. "That's enough for me. It's a wonder we're not in Yankee hands before this."

"It's a close enough escape for me," said Fred Randolph.

"I wonder whose brigade that is?" soliloquized Will. "It must be a part of Porter's division."

"I reckon that's the way of it," said Fred. "If Ewell was only up there now he could bag them."

"At any rate," said Will, "they can do us no harm. It is our duty now to go on to Black Gap."

"We must turn the tide for Barton."

"I hope so."

"I hope we get there on time. Do you know the right road thither?"

"Not exactly! But I know that Black Gap is in the heart of those mountains over yonder. It is a tough place to fight in. There are deep ravines, high mountain precipices and narrow roads. I don't see how a battle could be fought in there."

"It would have to be a siege."

"Oh, yes! I think so."

"Well, shall we go ahead?"

"By all means."

So the little troop galloped on. It was estimated to be five miles to Black Gap.

The intervening country was dotted with farm houses. The Grays galloped on for a short distance, when they came to a small creek.

Here, as they were preparing to ford it, a startling thing happened. A man stepped out of a thicket.

He was a type of farmer. At sight of him Sam Payton, one of the corporals of the Grays, gave a sharp cry of delight.

"It's Dan Lawton! I thought we were near his home. Hello, Dan!"

Payton sprung down and advanced to meet the farmer. The latter looked quizzically at the young corporal a moment, and then his face lighted up.

"Hello! By ginger, is it you, Sam? Wall, I'm durned glad ter see you!"

The two shook hands. Will, seated on his horse near, watched the scene. Every word came to his ears.

"How are all the folks? How is Eva?" asked Sam, eagerly.

"Everybody is well. Eva is as slick as a button. She's been lookin' for you to come along this way, now Lee is headed north. I say, boy, ye're a handsome sojer."

Sam blushed like a peony.

"We're going over to Black Gap to help Colonel Barton out of a scrape," he said. "I'm afraid I can't stop this time. We may be back this way."

"Eh?" exclaimed the farmer. "Thet's jest what brought me out here. My boy Willie was out hunting 'possums, when he saw a whole regiment of Union cavalry halt an' camp down yonder in ther bottom. If ye go on jest now ye'll run plump into 'em."

In an instant Will Prentiss was interested. He caught the words of the farmer.

Sam turned instinctively to his young captain. Will spurred his horse nearer.

"What's that you say, sir?" he asked. "You report a Union regiment of cavalry ahead?"

"Yas, sir!" replied the farmer.

"Do you know how many there are in the regiment?"

"I should think it was a pooty full company of 'em. There must be nigh on to a thousand men."

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Sam. "We don't jest keer about running into them, do we, Captain Prentiss?"

"Not with our present force," said Will. "How far ahead did you say they were?"

"About half a mile."

"Then we must be near the pickets."

"You are."

"Humph!" said Will, in a vexed tone. "Do you know which way they were headed when they stopped to camp?"

"They were coming this way, Willie said."

"Ah! Where is your boy?"

"He's over to the house, sir."

"Where is your house?"

"Jest a bit over yonder through the bushes. I reckon ye'd better ride over and wait for the Yankees to pass. It's a durned sight ther safest."

Will did not feel disposed to dispute the farmer's conclusion. For a moment he was undecided what to do.

He did not like to waste time.

It was highly important that he should at once push on to try and relieve Barton. But it would have been madness to advance and meet such a superior force of cavalry.

To attempt to cope with such a big force would mean utter extinction.

Will Prentiss was not a coward, but he was cautious to the proper degree.

At once he decided to adopt the farmer's advice and turn aside. This was hastened by an incident.

A shrill voice broke the air, and a boy came out of the underbrush.

"Paw! Oh, paw!"

"Hyar he is now!" cried the West Virginian. "Hyar's my boy."

"Oh, paw," cried the boy, "the Yankees are coming up the road jest as fast as they kin. They'll be here in a few minnits!"

The farmer turned a startled gaze upon Will. The young captain waited for no more.

He turned his horse into the lane and gave sharp orders to the Grays. Three minutes later they emerged from the scrub and came to the farm house.

This was a comfortable structure, with fertile fields about it. The Grays dismounted and quickly formed to repel an attack, if it should come.

In the door of the house stood a young girl neatly dressed and pretty. She rushed out, and the next moment Sam Payton was by her side.

Eva Lawton, the pretty daughter of the West Virginia farmer, was the sweetheart of the young Confederate corporal. Sam thought more of this pretty young country girl than he did of his life.

Mrs. Lawton had died a few years previous. Eva had remained at home to care for her father and her brother Willie.

The meeting between Sam and his sweetheart was a happy one.

As good luck had it, the Union cavalry regiment galloped by, unsuspecting the proximity of the Grays.

It was, indeed, a close call for the little company of Confederates. But for the farmer's boy they might have been captured.

Will was grateful, indeed, and rewarded the boy well. The young captain learned some interesting facts.

"Yas," agreed the farmer, "thar's a regiment of Yankees hev got Colonel Jack Barton shut up in Black Gap. He kain't get out, but he kin hold 'em off, an' they don't dare to go in thar to attack him. I tell ye, it's a hot fight.

"But ther trouble is, Barton's boys ain't got nuthin' to eat, an' ther Yankee colonel is jest starvin' 'em out. Unless Jack gets help soon, he may hev ter surrender."

Will set his teeth hard.

"I see the point," he said. "We are supposed to make a diversion in the rear of the Union force and cause them to withdraw or give Barton a chance to break through."

"Good!" cried the farmer with joy. "I hope ye'll do it. Colonel Jack is too fine a fellow to spend his days in a Yankee prison."

"Well, that is our mission. We'll do our best."

"I wish ye luck, captain."

"Thank you."

Will now gave orders for the Grays to again fall in. The boy, Willie, pleaded to be allowed to go with the Grays.

"I kin shoot a gun!" he declared. "I want to be a scout an' fight fer ther Confederacy."

"Wait till ye git out of yer pinafore," growled the farmer. "You ain't old enough yet, son. You'll stay at home."

"A couple of years more will make a man of you!" laughed Will. "Don't get discouraged, my boy."

So the Grays rode away. Sam Payton bade farewell to his sweetheart and promised to return after the war.

The Grays were soon again on the highway. It was not over two miles now to the Gap. They should be there in a few minutes.

But the last mile was up a very rough and steep road, where it was necessary to proceed slowly; so Will did not count on reaching the scene in quick time.

Moreover, it would be necessary to approach with caution.

The foe had position in the rocky pass, where they were well protected by heavy ledges and boulders.

It was the desire of Will Prentiss to waste not a moment of time. He knew the importance of being on time.

But it seemed as if fate conspired to defeat his ends. They had just passed the creek and reached the brow of a steep hill, when he caught the glimpse of blue uniforms far below.

The very moment that he saw the foe he was seen also.

A loud yell was heard, and bullets came whistling up the hill. Will saw a heavy line of cavalry coming for him.

He hastily formed the Grays and gave them a volley. But it was like the shedding of water from a duck's back.

Will saw in that moment that they would be overwhelmed. There was nothing that could save them but flight.

So he turned and gave the order:

"Right about face! Gallop!"

Away went the Grays full tilt. After them came the yelling horde. Will felt a sinking sensation of dismay.

Was his purpose to be defeated?

Were they to fall into the hands of the foe? It was a dismaying reflection.

Just then he swerved his horse into a side road. The Grays followed.

The road led into scrub growth.

Where it extended to the young captain did not know. He did know that to stick to it meant to be run down by the pursuers with the faster horses.

So, after following this a ways, and knowing the foe were close upon his heels all the while, he turned into the scrub growth.

The Grays followed.

There was some floundering through the dense growth. Several of the boys were unhorsed. But five minutes later they came out upon a little rocky eminence. Through this was a sort of cleft.

Here Will pulled up his horse.

With quick, sharp orders he formed his men along the eminence. The horses were taken into the cleft.

The pursuers had also turned into the scrub growth. They were also floundering through it.

They came out at the base of the eminence, only to meet a murderous fire. Half hidden as they were in the scrub, there was no effective way to return it.

They were shot down helplessly. Once, twice they tried to charge.

But each time they were scattered. Then they fell back, and the Grays felt safe.

In their present position they felt they could hold an army at bay.

CHAPTER V.

THE DESERTER.

The Union pursuers retired. For a time the Grays held their position.

Will, however, knew that it would not do to remain where they were. Night was beginning to shut down.

He saw that it was not going to be possible to help Barton that day. To attempt to advance after dark would be madness.

For they might at any moment run into a trap.

"Well, pard," cried Fred, as he came up, "we pulled out of that scrape, only to get into another."

"Well," said Will, philosophically, "if we can keep on pulling out of them all as well we shall be all right."

"That is true. But what move shall we make now?"

"That is the question."

"We can't stay here."

"Not very well."

"I have an idea that we can push up through this little cleft in the hill and perhaps work our way around that cavalry detachment. What is your opinion?"

"I think that quite possible. We must find some safe camping place."

"That is right."

"At any rate," said Will, "we will go as far as we can before darkness shuts down."

So the Grays were given orders to mount. In a few moments they were advancing through the cleft in the hill.

Passing through this, they found that the nature of the country was such that they were all the time working to the north of Black Gap.

But Will did not altogether object to this. He simply wished to evade the cavalry, which seemed to occupy the main road.

Thus matters were, when they came suddenly into a narrow path which led through the woods.

Will reined in his horse, undecided what course to take, when a man in blue uniform sprang out of the thicket and held up his hands.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Don't fire! I'm a friend."

Astonished, the Grays all stared at him. His uniform had caused several to raise their carbines. But they lowered them.

The fellow had a forbidding face, which did not impress Will favorably; but he called out to him:

"Come forward and give an account of yourself."

The fellow walked forward.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Seth Hanley. I belonged to the First Connecticut volunteers," he replied.

"You're a Yankee?"

"Yes."

"Do you surrender?"

"Surrender?" said the fellow, with a leer. "I'm a deserter. I'm sick of fightin' on thet side. I want ter join your army."

Desertions were common on both sides during the Civil War. It was quite a common thing for soldiers to leave one army to seek service in the other.

Personal spite, jealousies, and fancied wrongs were usually the reasons. Will could not refuse the fellow's overtures, but he said:

"You are an infantryman?"

"Yes."

"Well, we can't take you into our company, for our muster roll is full. But you can go back to the rear and join Ewell."

"That's all right, captain. But don't send me back yet. I kin be of great help to ye."

"Ah!" exclaimed Will. "How is that?"

"Ye see, I belong ter Bates' regiment. He has a lot of yer boys cooped up thar in ther Gap. I kin give you ther tip how ter work a little surprise on Bates."

Will grasped the plan.

"Do you mean that?"

"Sartin I do."

With this Will proceeded to question the Union deserter closely. He told a straightforward story, and there was no reason to believe that he was other than sincere.

His story was one of trouble with the lieutenant of his company, which resulted in his having a personal encounter with him. Fearful of the consequences, he had at once deserted.

He could not go back, for he would be shot. There was no alternative for him, but to join the Confederate army.

So Will saw no reason to disbelieve the fellow. After closely questioning him, the boy captain said:

"Well, Hanley, I'm going to take your word for it. If I find that you have lied to me, you can easily guess what your fate will be."

"If ye find I have lied to ye, it will be an easy matter ter settle," said the deserter. "I'll not kick if ye shoot me."

"You say you belonged to the regiment of Colonel Bates?"

"Yas."

"He is starving Barton out?"

"Yas; I reckon ther Confed's ain't got nothin' better ter eat than grasshoppers an' toads, and they'll have to cave sooner or later."

"Ah! Bates holds the Gap so that they can't retreat?"

"They kain't get out no way. But thar's a way. I know of a path leading up from ther north side of ther mountain. If ye could throw a company of men up in thar they could break Bates' line like a string an' let Barton an' his boys out by this path afore Bates could get enough of his regiment up to stay 'em. Do ye see?"

"Yes," said Will, eagerly. "It is understood that you will show us that path."

"Sure enough!"

"Very well. I am going to repose confidence in you, sir. Remember, it is death if you deceive me."

The deserter reiterated his sincerity. Then Will turned him over to Sergeant Spotswood for rations and a blanket.

"I say, Will," said Fred Randolph, after the interview, "there's something about that chap that I don't like."

"Well, I agree with you," said the boy captain. "But I guess he's all right in this case. Otherwise I wouldn't want to trust him very far."

"Nor I! He has a regular hang-dog way about him."

"He certainly has. Oh, well! we will keep our eyes open."

A short while later the path they were following turned into a little glade. Here Will decided to camp.

The Grays dismounted, and the horses were corralled. Then they ventured to make a few small fires.

Over these they roasted some chickens which they had procured at the Warley plantation.

Things were soon made comfortable in the camp, and the Grays were making the best of it, as soldier boys will.

Will placed a good line of pickets about the camp. He was quite fatigued and retired early to rest. One by one,

the rest of the boys did the same, and by midnight the camp was quiet.

If any Union foe hovered near, they did not put in an appearance. The Grays slept undisturbed until morning.

When Will Prentiss retired to rest he had removed his watch and his pocketbook, filled with gold eagles, and placed them under the knapsack which formed his pillow.

When he unrolled himself from his blanket in the morning to get up he felt for them and received a startling shock.

They were gone.

All search resulted in finding no trace of them. The boy captain was startled beyond measure. He tried to explain the mystery in some practical way, for he could not believe that there was a thief among the Grays.

He arose and tried to think.

He remembered positively putting the watch under his pillow. This could not be eradicated. What, then, had become of it?

The valuables could not have taken wings of themselves and flown away.

Will was now convinced that there was a thief in the camp. Assuredly the valuables had been stolen.

The boy captain felt a sickening sense of horror. He did not like to think that any of his boys would steal.

Just then he heard an outcry.

"I say, who has taken my money? Somebody has gone through my clothes."

It was Sergeant Spotswood.

In a moment Will walked toward him.

"What have you lost, Joe?" he asked.

"Why, all my money. I took off my fatigue jacket and laid it down beside me. The money was in an inner pocket."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I am."

"And it's not there now?"

"No."

"Well," said Will, "there is something wrong. I also have been robbed."

"You?" gasped the orderly-sergeant.

"Yes."

"Jingo! Who would do such a thing?" Then the orderly-sergeant gave a gasp. "That Union deserter—where is he?"

Like a flash the same thought came to Will. Beyond doubt it was the deserter who had done it.

For a moment Will's gorge rose. He was thoroughly angry.

"The vile scoundrel!" he gritted. "We took him in and befriended him. See that he don't jump the camp. I'll make him confess."

At once the word went around, and inquiry was made for Seth Hanley. But a dismaying discovery was made.

He was not to be found.

He had left the camp in the early morning hours. One of the pickets said that he had gone outside the lines to get water from a nearby spring.

He had not returned.

All was plain enough. The cunning villain had watched Will place his valuables under the knapsack. While he slept he had adroitly filched them.

It is hardly necessary to say that the Grays were intensely excited and indignant. Had the cowardly thief been within reach at that moment they might have visited summary vengeance upon him.

"It's all right," gritted Will. "But he must be overtaken. He will carry word of our purpose to Bates, and we will be defeated in our plans."

"Find him?" cried Fred Randolph. "It would be like looking for a needle in a haystack."

"Don't you believe it!" cried Joe Spotswood. "I can trail him."

"You?" exclaimed Fred.

"Yes, indeed. I know all about that sort of thing. I learned it of an Indian. I can follow him over anything but hard, flinty soil."

"Prove your words, Joe!" cried Will. "I will leave the company in your charge, Fred. Give us a dozen men. Corporal Payton, call out twelve men."

"All right, captain."

The corporal soon had the detachment in line. Will now watched Spotswood's operations.

It was really true that the orderly-sergeant understood the Indian art of trailing. He inquired of the picket who had passed the deserter out, and learned that he had gone north.

Then the sergeant began to pick up the trail through the woods with unerring eye.

For a mile he followed it through the brakes and mosses. Then the little party of pursuers came to a purling stream, which wound its way through the forest.

CHAPTER VI.

A TIMELY ARRIVAL.

To prove his sagacity and that he had kept the trail, Spotswood pointed to a footprint in the soft soil beside the stream.

"Here is where he crossed," he said. "The footprint now points east."

"Does that indicate that he has changed his course?" asked Will.

"Oh, no!" replied Spotswood. "It simply indicates that he turned eastward when he crossed the stream."

For another half hour they followed the trail. Then Joe Spotswood began to sniff the air.

"I smell a camp fire," he whispered.

A thrill seized upon Will.

"Ah!" he whispered. "We shall get him now. He probably stopped and made camp."

"Perhaps so!"

But the scent led the way unerringly to a little clearing. Here smouldered the ashes of a small camp fire.

But whoever had slept by was now gone. No sign of human being could be seen.

Yet some one had paused here and made a fire. Broken boughs also showed that they had also made a bed and slept there.

Joe examined the spot closely. Then he made a startling statement.

"There were four of them," he said.

"Four?" gasped Will.

"Yes, and there is every reason to believe that they were Union soldiers. Here are the imprints of the butts of their muskets as they stacked them by the fire. Here is a brass button with the letters 'U. S.' on it."

"Well," exclaimed Will, with a deep breath, "you think Hanley joined them?"

"Of course! Either that, or he came here soon after they left."

"Perhaps he knew that they were here and came here to join them."

"That is possible. But it is more likely that he came upon them by accident. At any rate, they are gone."

Will was disappointed.

"It's a pity we could not have been a little sooner," he said.

"Yes," agreed Joe. "But the only way to do is to keep right on. Perhaps we will yet overtake them."

So they went on. Joe, with the wonderful scent of a sleuth-hound, followed the trail. It was indeed wonderful.

But suddenly the woods grew thin.

Then a field appeared.

Beyond it was another. Beyond that was the roof of a farm house. All exchanged glances.

"It's Lawton's farm!" exclaimed Sam Payton. "Do you think they are over there?"

"That is a question."

"Do you know what I think?" said Joe.

"What?"

"I think they are all deserters and a hard gang. They are working their way north, where they will endeavor to keep out of the way of the military officers and enjoy their ill-gotten gains."

"So do I!" cried Will.

"Ah, what is that?"

All gave a start. There was an excellent reason for it. To the ears of all came a startling sound.

It was a feminine scream.

In an instant Sam Payton, white-faced, leaped the rail fence.

"They're over to the house, boys!" he cried. "They are probably up to some rascality. Let's get over there."

It needed no further word.

The Grays started for the farm house on the run. As they drew nearer they could hear an uproar.

Will Prentiss and Sam Payton were the first to reach the house. Will paused a moment to glance in at an open window. The sight he beheld gave him a thrill.

The room was greatly disordered. On the floor lay the boy, Willie, bound hand and foot.

In the center of the floor was the farmer, Lawton, being choked and overcome by two of the deserters. One of them was Hanley.

Eva Lawton was trying to gain the door and screaming wildly. It was just then that Hanley saw Will at the window. The effect upon him was great.

"Stop that girl's screams!" yelled Hanley, as he tightened his grip on the farmer's throat.

One of the deserters tried to push Eva into a closet. But the house door flew open, and soldiers in gray appeared just in the nick of time.

Sam Payton was the first in the room. He felled the rascal who had his grip on Eva with one awful blow of his musket-butt.

The other villains, Hanley with them, made a break for the hallway beyond.

But a bullet brought one of them down. Hanley threw up his arms and yelled:

"I surrender!"

All four were captured. The one felled by Payton did not come to for some time. The one who had been shot was dead when he was reached by the others.

In an instant Eva Lawton was in Sam Payton's arms. The farmer, Dan Lawton, who had thought that all was lost, was overcome with joy.

Will Prentiss cut the bonds of the boy, Willie, who told the story.

"They jumped in on me," he said, "and that tall one knocked me down. Then they tied me and told me if I didn't tell them where all the money was in the house they would kill me.

"Just then dad and Eva came in. Oh, it was awful. If you hadn't come, we should have been goners, all of us."

"As it is, we owe all to you and your brave soldiers, Captain Prentiss," said Eva Lawton, gratefully.

"We are only too glad to have been of service," said Will, politely.

Then he turned to Hanley.

"You atrocious scoundrel!" he cried. "Where is my watch and money?"

"In my pocket," whined the deserter.

Will resurrected his valuables and found them intact. Also, Joe Spotswood recovered his money.

The villain was trembling with fear.

"I'm, sorry," he whined. "If ye'll give me a chance I'll never do it again."

"I don't believe you will," rejoined Will Prentiss. "What was your purpose?"

"We wanted to get back north and begin life all over again as honest men."

"Ah, that's it. Begin a life of honesty with stolen money."

"Ye kain't exactly say that, for we took it from the enemy."

"Quite a fine distinction," said Will, with angry contempt.

"What will ye do with us, captain?"

"Do with you? Do you want me to tell you?"

"Won't ye let us go?"

"Go? Oh, yes! We'll give you a chance for life, I'm going to send you under a flag of truce to the Union lines."

An awful yell of terror escaped from the lips of the three deserters.

"Oh, no, no!" they pleaded. "Don't do that! If yer going to kill us, shoot us yerselves. Don't send us back there!"

"Ah," said Will, "I can see that you are a lot of deep-dyed villains. Shooting is too merciful for you. But I shall adhere to my purpose to send you back to the Union lines."

The three deserters raved and begged in the wildest manner. But Will was inexorable.

Farmer Lawton, in the fullness of his gratitude, tried to induce all to stay to dinner. But Will was anxious to get back to the Grays.

"We have an important day's work before us, Mr. Lawton," he said. "We must effect the rescue of Colonel Barton."

"I shall pray for your success!" cried Eva Lawton.

"Thank you!" replied Will. "I have an idea we will succeed. If we do we will be much pleased."

So the detachment of Grays, with their three prisoners, prepared to leave. They were soon under way and marching rapidly back the way they had come.

After awhile they made their way down the little path to where the Grays were yet encamped and waiting.

They met with a great reception.

The capture of the deserters was deemed a remarkable feat. But Will was bound to place the credit where it belonged.

"It's all owing to Joe Spotswood and his Indian training," he said. "He took us right to the spot."

At this the Grays gave Joe a rousing cheer. Soon the little company was marching away into the mountains.

Will had an idea that whatever the deserter Hanley had done he had not lied about the mountain path and the feasibility of the plan to rescue Barton.

Convinced that this was possible, Will decided to begin a search for the path.

Now, however, as they were marching on, Hanley called to him, earnestly:

"Captain, will ye listen to a doomed man?" he pleaded. "I ain't asking for my life. I know I've got to die. But I am interested in yer project, and I kin help ye to do it."

So persistent was he that Will finally gave ear to his pleadings.

"I know whar that path is, and I kin help ye to find it," he said. "Will ye jest give me the chance?"

Will hesitated a moment.

He did not want the fellow's life. He knew that to send him back to the Union lines was equivalent to death.

At the same time, to give him liberty at the present moment would be the height of folly and danger.

So he made his decision.

"Hanley," he said, "you are a bad egg. How do you expect me to trust you?"

"I know it, captain," replied the deserter; "but I swear it to you that I am in earnest. Jest give me a trial."

"Well," said Will, "I will make you a proposition."

The villain's face lighted up eagerly.

"Eh?" he asked. "What is it?"

"If you can show us the path you speak of, and it results in our rescue of Barton, I'll spare your life. I'll not send you to the Union lines."

The villain drew a deep breath. With convincing manner, he replied:

"I'll surely take ye over thar, and it will be jest as I say. You kin trust me for that. I'll not fail ye this time."

"Mind, I shall not set you free yet. I shall hold you a prisoner until I get back to General Ewell. Then you must strike for yourself."

"Do ye mean it?" cried Hanley, eagerly.

"Yes."

"God bless ye! I'll never betray ye agin. I'm an honest man from this on."

Whether he ever kept this latter promise Will never knew. But he proceeded to give the young captain directions that convinced him that he was telling the truth about the mountain path.

Soon the Grays were climbing it.

By the middle of the afternoon they came out upon a little spur of hills. Far below they saw the depths of the Gap.

And there, on a little plateau which commanded the Gap, they saw the encampment and trenches of the beleaguered Confederates. Will saw with interest that they were in an unassailable position.

It was now a question as to how to give them the needed relief.

CHAPTER VII.

RAISING THE SIEGE.

The boy captain of the Grays took in the situation with careful eye. He noted the position of the besieged Confederates and also the surrounding line of the Union soldiers.

He saw just what Seth Hanley had said, that the narrow path was defended by but one small detachment.

This could be attacked and pushed aside, and before any considerable force could arrive to reinforce it, the Union soldiers would be too late to prevent the escape of the Confederates.

Realizing this fully, Will decided to strike the blow at once.

He called the Grays together and told them just what his purpose was.

"We shall advance by this path," he said. "In a few minutes no doubt we will come upon the Union picket line. Now, it is our game to break through that like a flash and attack the line."

"The moment we break their line, I want two volunteers

to ride down as fast as they can to apprise Colonel Barton of our presence and of the possibility of his escape, so that he can marshal his men and make a dash as quickly as possible."

In an instant two of the Grays stepped out as volunteers. Will was much pleased.

"Very good!" he said. "Now we will make the attack. Ready! Forward!"

Down the path they rode.

Suddenly a sharp hail went up from the Union picket. Then a shot followed and the signal of alarm.

The next moment the Grays found themselves confronted by a line of determined men in blue. They fired a volley, which emptied several saddles.

But the Grays never faltered.

They went on like a whirlwind. They struck the Union line like a thunderbolt, and with the first impact went through it.

There was a brief and desperate hand-to-hand combat. Then the Union soldiers were scattered.

The two volunteers went down into the Gap with fearful speed. It was a perilous mission, for at any moment a shot from the Union line on either side might bring them down.

But, though the bullets whistled all about them, none struck them.

They seemed to bear charmed lives, and went through to the plateau. It is hardly necessary to say that the beleaguered Confederates were crazed with delight.

Haggard and gaunt from hunger, they were yet able to exert themselves enough to form and charge up the path.

They left their old camp behind them and, answering the Union fire on both sides, went on up the path. It was not twenty minutes later when they reached the spot where the Grays awaited them.

Will Prentiss knew there was not a moment's time to lose.

For if they remained there it would be undoubtedly to fall into the hands of the Yankees. The dangers of the position were impressed upon Will in most powerful fashion.

But he was not the one to shrink in face of peril.

He met Colonel Jack Barton and a quick consultation was held. Barton was amazed when he saw what a small force had come to his relief.

"Why didn't Ewell send a brigade? This region swarms with Yankees. It's a wonder to me how you got through."

"In any event," said Will, "we are losing time here. Let us go on."

Clearly that was the only way. So Will gave the order to his men to lead the way. They quickly began the retreat out of the hills.

And now began the running fight, which was most persistent and desperate.

The nature of the country did not permit the Union force to concentrate and attack in force. They could only creep up through the hills, a detachment here and there, and keep up a desultory fire.

The Grays answered as best they could.

So far as they were personally concerned, they could easily have made a dash out of the hills and quickly escaped.

But Barton's men, half starved and weakened, could only stagger along. It was slow work.

"On my word, Will," said Fred Randolph, anxiously, "I am afraid we will be cut off before we get out of here."

"It looks bad," said Will, with clouded brow. "I only wish we could mount Barton's men. We could soon manage to get out all right."

Instantly an idea occurred to Fred.

"By jingo!" he exclaimed. "Why can't we ride double? Barton has but a few more men left than we have."

But Will shook his head.

"I am afraid that will not work," he said. "We would have to leave at least a third of his men behind. No; our only method is to go on just as we are."

So the Grays kept on, and Barton's decimated brigade kept on behind them.

The Union besiegers were now pressing hotly on the rear of the retreating force. Will Prentiss was obliged to send half his company back to act as a rearguard.

But there must be an end to all things. So it happened that after a time they came to the open country.

Now the Union pursuers were beginning to fall behind. It looked to Will as if the enterprise was a success.

Certainly they had relieved Barton, and he was now on the high road to safety. By this time Ewell's division ought to be in the vicinity.

Its arrival would drive back the Union brigades, which seemed to be so widely scattered over the region.

Will now took the precaution to send out scouts far ahead. He had no desire to blunder into an ambush.

It was only five miles to Warley's plantation. Certainly Ewell should have arrived there by this time.

Ordinarily five miles is not a long march. Will reckoned that they should reach Warley's in at least two hours.

He knew that he had left the Union troops in possession of the plantation. If they were yet there he would go around the place.

Colonel Barton rode beside Will. He was a handsome, dashing fellow, though now his long siege had left him pale and haggard.

"Captain Prentiss," he said, as they ambled along, "is it the intention of General Lee to enter Maryland?"

"I think it is," replied Will.

The colonel's eyes glistened.

"I hope, then, it will be my good fortune to ride with the advance guard. Nearly all of my relatives reside there, and it will be a pleasure to meet them."

"I hope you have that pleasure," said Will; "but your regiment will need reorganizing."

"There is the trouble. I fear that it will take too long to bring that about. However, I shall make every effort. If I don't succeed, I shall apply for a position on General Lee's staff."

"I have no doubt you will be able to obtain it all right."

"I hope so! Hello! What's that?"

The colonel reined his horse up short. Will did the same.

There was a good reason for this. That which caught their gaze ahead was a thrilling spectacle.

A long line of gray was seen to wind down a hillside. There were glittering bayonets and battle flags. All the panoply of an army was to be seen.

Will Prentiss rose in his stirrups and his gaze kindled: "It's Ewell at last!" he cried. "Hurrah! The tide is turned! We will drive the foe out of this region now."

Will's words were an inspiration for the Grays. They sent up a ringing cheer.

It reached the hearing of the outriders of the Confederate line. At once a troop of cavalry came bearing down toward them.

Will, with Colonel Barton and Lieutenant Randolph, rode out to meet them.

The officer at the head of the troop was Colonel Fosdick, of Ewell's staff. At sight of Will he swung his hat.

"Hello, Prentiss! Is that you? Did you relieve Barton? Why, it's Barton himself. This is grand! You really did it, eh? Come with me. General Ewell is over yonder on the hillside. He will want to see you at once."

"I will report to General Ewell at once with pleasure," said Will. "Lieutenant Randolph, march our command inside the line of advance. I will rejoin you later."

"That is right," said Fosdick. "We intend to halt on yonder height, for there is a concentration of the enemy in our front. We shall give them a fight."

"All right."

"Your men look bad, Barton."

"They ought to," replied the colonel. "They have lived several days with hardly any food."

"The commissary shall attend to their wants at once. I will see to that personally."

"Thank you, Colonel Fosdick. The boys will be grateful."

So Will and Colonel Barton rode away with Fosdick. In a short while they had traversed the front of the army line and come to the little knoll where General Ewell and his staff were.

It is hardly necessary to say that they met with a warm welcome.

"On my word, Prentiss, you have done well!" cried General Ewell. "With your little company to drive those Union forces was an unheard of thing. And you have really got Barton out of his difficulty?"

"Here I am!" cried Barton. "And I owe it all to Prentiss!"

"Wonderful! Barton, send your men to the rear. I will give the commissary orders to feed them. For the present you had better attach yourself to my staff."

"I shall be glad to do that," replied the colonel, with pleasure. "Is the outlook good for some fighting?"

"It is going to be skirmishing all the way to Thoroughfare Gap. You will see all you want, I can promise you."

CHAPTER VIII.

WILL KEEPS HIS WORD.

"Nothing will suit me better," said Barton. "Anything is better than being cooped up in that hole in the hills, where we could do nothing but bush fight."

"It is almost incomprehensible to me how you got out of there," said Ewell.

"I will tell you, general," said Will. "It was through the advice of a Union deserter named Seth Hanley. He knew a path over the mountain which enabled us to strike the Union line of siege where it was the weakest."

General Ewell gave a mighty start.

"Eh?" he exclaimed. "What did you say that fellow's name was?"

"Seth Hanley."

"Is he a prisoner?"

"Yes."

"I want to see him."

Both Will and Barton looked sharply at General Ewell. They were puzzled.

"Very well, sir," agreed Will. "I will have him brought to you."

"Our line will rest here," said the general. "They are pitching my tent now over there to the right. Bring him over there in half an hour."

"It shall be done!"

Will and Colonel Barton now parted. It was Barton's intention now to attach himself to Ewell's staff. An orderly had been sent to direct his men to the rear.

The boy captain rode away at full speed now to join his company. As he did so he felt a sense of curiosity.

Why was General Ewell so interested in the villain Hanley? Why had he sent for him? What did it mean?

Of course there was no immediate answer to the query. All he could do was to await developments.

But of one thing he felt sure. General Ewell knew Hanley.

As soon as bivouac was made and it was seen that the whole line of the army had done the same, Will sought out Hanley, and said:

"Hanley, I have a great honor for you!"

The deserter looked surprised.

"Eh?" he exclaimed. "What is it?"

"General Ewell has expressed a desire to see you. You are to be taken before him."

Hanley's eyes glittered. His swarthy face seemed to grow a shade lighter. He leaned forward and said:

"I say, Prentiss, you know what you promised me?"

"I promised you that I would not send you to the Union lines."

"Jest so! Now, if I was to choose between that an' seein' the colonel, I'd take the former every time."

Will was surprised.

"Ah!" he said. "Will you explain?"

"I think I can. General Ewell and I had a little affair

when we were younger. I'll not tell ye what it was, but he will shoot me on sight."

"Shoot you?" gasped Will.

"Yes, and that is no joke! I am telling you the truth. He will shoot me on sight. So, if you want to end my career, jest send me over to see Ewell."

Now, Will had no idea of sending his prisoner to be shot.

He pondered over the matter a few moments. Then he decided upon a plan of action.

"You say Ewell will kill you?" he asked.

"On sight."

"There is no way to patch up a reconciliation?"

"I don't believe it. I know Ewell don't forget a man. He means it."

Will held up his hand.

"Follow me!" he said, brusquely. "Have you rations?"

"Yas."

"Very good. Take them with you."

Hanley grinned and placed a hand on his well-filled pockets. He felt equal to almost any emergency.

But he now proceeded to walk far out beyond the picket with Will. The boy captain led the way until they were well beyond the confines of the camp.

Then he turned and said:

"Hanley, I know you are a rascal, but you did me a good turn, and I mean to see that you are repaid for it. Now, yonder is a highway. Take it and never return to the Confederacy."

Hanley held out his hand. There was something like emotion in his face as he said:

"Shake hands, captain. I never knew thar was a square man like you in the hull world. If thar was more like ye, there wouldn't be so many like me."

"Thank you, Hanley," said Will, cordially. "See if you can't live a better life."

"I will! I mean jest what I say. Seth Hanley has done his last dirty job of work. I owe it to you, cap'n."

"Very good Hanley. I am much pleased."

"Good-by, Cap'n Prentiss."

"Good-by."

The deserter turned and glided away. In a few moments he had passed from view down the highway.

Will Prentiss returned to the camp. He said nothing to any one of what he had done.

But in half an hour he strolled over to General Ewell's headquarters. The officer was busy with maps.

"Hello, Prentiss!" he cried. "You're just the fellow I want."

"Good!" replied Will. "Then I am in good time."

"Yes, you are."

"I am glad of that. In what manner can I serve you?"

"Are your men in good condition?"

"Excellent."

"That is good. I want you, then, to ride out on our right flank and scout through the country eastward. If you see any signs of the enemy, keep us posted."

"I shall be very glad to do so," replied Will. "Shall I start at once?"

"Yes."

Will saluted and turned away. He was at the tent entrance when Ewell suddenly turned in his chair.

"One moment, Prentiss."

"Yes, general."

"You forgot to bring that prisoner Hanley hither. Where is he?"

"I am sorry to report, sir, that he has escaped."

General Ewell knit his brows in a disappointed way. He was reflective for some moments. Then he muttered:

"That fellow has the Old Nick on his side. He beats anything I ever saw. All right, Prentiss. Carry out my orders."

"I will do so, general."

Will at once took his leave. He was indeed much delighted. He had set Hanley free, and no doubt saved his neck, for there was no doubt that Ewell would have surely hung him.

When Will got back to the bivouac of the Grays he met Fred Randolph.

"Fred," he cried, "give the order for boots and saddles. We are ordered out again."

At once the bivouac was broken up. The Grays saddled their horses and mounted. They rode rapidly away.

An hour's ride brought them to the crossroads, one of which led to the plantation of the Warleys.

Will reined his horse up and hesitated for a moment. Fred Randolph, who was beside him, said:

"This road goes up to Warley's."

"Yes," replied the young captain.

"Do you suppose any of the Union troops are yet hanging about there?"

"We will go up and see."

And, yielding to impulse, Will turned his horse toward the plantation. The Grays galloped on down the highway.

They passed several negro cabins and entered a belt of timber.

Beyond this the country opened, and the buildings of the Warley plantation were to be seen.

Will now recalled the fact that General Ewell had forgotten to ask him about the Warley place, and whether he had carried out his orders to burn it or not.

That he had not done so, and for what reasons, the reader already knows. The boy captain now pulled up cautiously.

Will now decided to deploy the Grays and leave them where they were, while with Fred he went forward to reconnoiter.

This was done, and in a few moments the young officers were approaching the mansion.

They saw no sign of human being about the place; not even a negro servant was visible.

So they crossed the gravel drive and approached the porch steps. Suddenly Will halted.

Voices came plainly to the ears of both young officers.

Ordinarily they would not have stooped to play the part of eavesdroppers.

But some of the words which caught their ears were of a character which would seem to compel them to do so.

A loud, strident voice was saying:

"I tell you that it is foolish of you, Lieutenant Maynell, to respect such a parole. Men on their side are breaking their paroles every day. We need your services. If you deliver yourself up you are a fool."

"Fool or not," said the voice of Maynell, "I prize my honor more than all else in the world. I shall not break my word."

Will and Fred instinctively drew nearer the low window, which was open. They beheld a striking scene.

At a table in the great drawing-room sat four men.

One of them was Stephen Warley. Beside him was Maynell.

The other two were Union officers, one of the rank of colonel, and the other a captain.

On the table were various papers. A hot discussion was in progress.

"Well, if you want to be a fool, do so," said the man in the colonel's uniform. "I can tell you, it means something to get in the power of the Confederates. Their prisons are not the most cheerful places in the world."

"I am not afraid of being imprisoned," said Maynell. "I shall expect to be exchanged at an early day."

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTURED.

At this the other Union officer held up his hands.

"I gave you credit for more sense, Maynell. There is a determined movement on the part of our government not to exchange."

The statement of the Union officer, while not at that moment a fact, was verified later. There has been much able criticism of this conduct of the U. S. Government, but it was assumed that they had sufficient reasons for it.

"Now," said Colonel Clements, for that was the name of the senior officer, "you must not yield to maudlin sentiment, Maynell. That is a mistaken idea. We need your services in our army, and you must return with us. If you absolutely refuse to do so, I must enforce your arrest and compel you to return."

Maynell's eyes flashed. He laid a hand on his sword.

"That is strong language," he said.

"I have the right. I am your superior officer."

"I am a paroled prisoner," said Maynell, determinedly.

"I gave my word to Captain Prentiss to deliver myself up to him, and I shall do so."

All the officers at the table arose.

"Captain Ross," said Clements, "I place Lieutenant Maynell in your hands. He is under arrest. You will take him to our camp and hold him under restraint until further orders from me."

Lieutenant Maynell stepped back. His sword leaped from its sheath.

His gaze was fierce and his words scathing, as he replied:

"Captain Ross attempts to execute that order at his peril."

"Must we use force?" cried Clements, also drawing his sword. Warley was in a paroxysm and rushed between them.

"For the love of Heaven, gentlemen," he cried, "let us have no trouble here. There is need enough of your swords on the battlefield without sacrificing life here. Be calm!"

"Not until Colonel Clements retracts his purpose to compel me to break my parole," said Maynell.

Will and Fred had seen and heard all up to this point. The window through which they gazed was low, reaching down to the floor of the porch.

It was open, and used ordinarily as a means of exit from the house upon the porch.

Without a moment's hesitation, Will Prentiss drew his sword and stepped boldly into the drawing-room. His footsteps caused all to turn.

"Gentlemen," he said, in a calm voice, "I am sorry to break in upon this interesting scene. But I am Captain Will Prentiss, and I have come for my prisoner, whose parole I accepted, and who stands yonder, Lieutenant Maynell."

For an instant a dead silence reigned. It was a thrilling tableau.

Clements glared at the two young Confederate officers with blanched cheeks. For aught he knew, they had a thousand men at their backs.

"What!" he stammered finally. "You—you are Captain Prentiss?"

"I am," replied Will.

"And you have come for Lieutenant Maynell?"

"I have, and incidentally I will ask you to deliver up your sword."

Clements' pallor increased, but a crafty gleam came into his eyes. He could see nothing of gray clad soldiers behind Will Prentiss.

Was he not backed up by them? The Union colonel made a feint to lay his sword upon the table. But as he did so he also made a signal for two Union privates, who, with muskets at rest, stood in the hall beyond.

The result was unexpected to Will and Fred, and its results quite disastrous.

Lieutenant Maynell had stepped forward, and now said:

"Captain Prentiss, I am at your service. I tried to report to you, but I could not find your company. I returned here to wait for you."

"Very well, Lieutenant Maynell," said Will. "I respect you for an honorable man. But I do not respect your colonel here."

"Oh, you don't!" sneered Clements. "Now, it may surprise you to know that you are in my power, and I am not, as you think, in yours."

Will gave a little start at the significance in the fellow's words.

For the first time, it occurred to him that he might be acting rashly in not having brought a guard of the Grays along. But he stepped forward quickly, saying:

"I will take your sword, colonel!"

"Only in this way!" gritted the Union colonel, suddenly snatching it up and making a vicious lunge at Will.

Only the ready wit and prompt action of Fred Randolph saved Will Prentiss at that moment.

As Clements' sword, a tongue of steel, darted forward, it crossed the blade of the young Confederate lieutenant. Fred threw the blade up just in time.

"You coward!" he cried, as he kicked the table over. "Now try it on even terms with me!"

But Clements had stepped back and snapped his fingers. A warning cry came from Maynell.

It was too late.

From the hall sprung the two Union guards. Their bayonets were placed at the throats of the two young officers.

"One move and you die!" hissed Clements. "Who has the upper hand now?"

Will and Fred were dumbfounded. They realized now, when it was too late, how foolhardy they had been. They saw that they were trapped.

"Disarm them!" commanded Clements. "Bind their arms behind them."

At once one of the privates took the young officers' weapons from them. He started to bind them, but Maynell now stepped forward.

"For shame, Clements! These are men of honor. You need not tie them up to keep them."

"Eh?" exclaimed Clements. "I believe you are more than half Confederate yourself."

"I believe in fair treatment," said Maynell, coldly. Clements face flushed, and he said:

"You need not bind them, guard. Now, Captain Ross, I fancy these fellows are not alone. They have comrades near by without a doubt. I wish you would step outside and see if they are visible in the vicinity."

"I may inform you that they are," replied Will. "You cannot hold us, sir, unless you have a superior force."

"Indeed!" said Clements, incredulously. "We shall soon see! Now, Lieutenant Maynell, to settle this matter with you. We have captured the man to whom you gave your parole, and that should set you free."

Technically, this was right, as Maynell knew. But he turned to Will and said:

"I am still at your service, captain."

"I release you," replied Will. "You have been rescued, and I have no longer claim upon you."

Lieutenant Maynell turned to Clements and saluted:

"I am now at your service!" he cried.

"Very good, sir," replied Clements. "I want you to command this guard and take charge of the prisoner. Ah, Ross, what do you discover?"

Ross had now returned.

"I find that there is a company of the Confederates at

the lower end of the garden," he said. "I should say that our position is very dangerous."

"No doubt of it!" agreed Clements. "But we will adjust that. Our horses are at the rear. No doubt Mr. Warley can give us a couple of his for the prisoners. We will slip out and ride away before anything can be done to prevent."

Maynell and the guards led the two Confederate prisoners out by a rear way, Warley acting as guide.

At the stable a couple of extra horses were procured. Maynell already possessed one. The party was quickly mounted.

The situation of Will and Fred was a much strained one. They were in anything but a cheerful frame of mind over it.

They would have tried giving their comrades a signal. But there seemed no easy way to do this.

Maynell had paused at the house door a moment, and Will caught a glimpse of the pale but beautiful Kate Warley.

The young girl's wound had so far progressed that she was able to again get around, though she was very weak. She took leave of her lover, who now came hurriedly out and mounted his horse.

Will could not reconcile himself to the thought that, on the other side of the house was a hundred of his men, who, could they have known his predicament, would have instantly come to his relief.

But, not knowing it, they might as well have been a thousand miles away.

Clements quickly led the way at an amble into a lane which led away from the plantation. In a short while they were leaving the place behind.

On they rode, the two prisoners in the center. They kept to the main highway for a mile and then turned across the fields and galloped down into a little dell among the trees.

Here were camp fires and a company of Union soldiers.

The prisoners were dismounted and placed under guard. Clements and Ross turned their horses over to a couple of negroes. As Maynell dismounted he passed near the prisoners, saying in an undertone:

"Don't lose courage."

CHAPTER X.

THE TURNING OF THE TIDE.

It was a cheering remark, and caused the two young prisoners to regard Maynell as a possible deliverer.

But he walked away, and they were left to their own thoughts. These were not of the most pleasant.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" muttered Fred. "Here's a pretty to-do, Will Prentiss. Could anything worse have befallen us?"

"It is our own fault."

"Oh, of course! But what fools we were! If we had only taken a little detachment with us."

"We ought to have!"

"Of course we ought! It looks now as if our campaigning days were over."

It was a bitter reflection to both.

"I have an idea that Maynell sympathizes with us."

"Oh, yes, no doubt. But he can give us little help."

"I am not so sure of that."

"Well, how can he aid us? Clements is his superior in rank."

"There are many ways, if he should choose to do so, I feel sure. But I do not count upon him. Night is at hand, though, and they may give us a chance."

So the two young officers clung to hope. They realized that it would have been an easy matter to have captured Clements and Ross if, in the first place, they had taken the precaution to surround the house.

The two boys sat disconsolately at the foot of a large oak tree, and the guard passed up and down. Once a daring thought had occurred to Will to try and run the guard.

This, however, was a most dangerous operation. One or both might get killed, so the project was not seriously considered.

Clements did not appear again to the prisoners. The sun was just descending below the horizon, when four men and a sergeant came up.

The sergeant addressed the guard, who saluted.

"Barlow, we have been ordered to take charge of the prisoners and march them to Manassas. They will then be sent to the War Department, at Washington."

The guard saluted again.

"Prisoners, fall in!"

In a short while they were marching out upon the highway. Darkness now begun to shut down.

The horses which they rode ambled along slowly over the highway. It seemed to Will as if they had ridden a mile, when suddenly the sergeant pulled rein.

He gave quick, sharp orders:

"Fall back. Deploy for attack!"

Instantly the four men of the guard obeyed. The prisoners on their horses were led into the shadows of the trees.

They were not a moment too soon. By the sergeant's orders, all dismounted in the shadows.

Two of the guards hastily bound their jackets across the mouths of the prisoners, so that they could make no outcry.

Then they waited. The thunder of hoofs was heard in the distance. Down the highway, with rattle of accoutrements, came a squad of cavalry.

Nearer they came. The two prisoners could make no outcry. The horses were concealed by the shadows of the trees.

From their hiding place though the little party could see the troop, in the dim light of the stars it looked as if their uniforms were gray.

Moreover, what convinced Will that they were Confederates was the fact that they wore hats, instead of caps.

How the two captive officers longed to give a loud shout of alarm. But they could not do so.

However, it was not to be the good fortune of the Union guard to have the Confederate cavalry pass them by.

One of the horses gave a loud whinny. It was taken up by another, and instantly answered from the passing troop.

Loud and shrill went up that neigh. The next moment the voice of the cavalry commander was heard:

"Company halt! Right about!"

The cavalcade came to a halt in the road. Orders ran back along the line.

"See what that is. Go into the bushes and find that horse!"

At once several of the cavalry company dismounted and advanced, pistols in hand, into the gloom. The Union colonel, Clements, saw that all was up.

With a yell he cried:

"Fire! Fire upon them! Mount and ride away! Hang on to the prisoners!"

In a moment the rattle of firearms smote upon the air. Then there was an attempt to force Will and Fred to mount.

But before this could be done they were surrounded by the Confederate cavalymen.

Clements and Ross and Maynell escaped. Two of the Union guards were captured. Will and Fred were released and led out into the road.

A sharp cry escaped the Confederate captain.

"Great Cæsar! Is that you, Prentiss? Don't you know me—Fred Lewis?"

"What!" cried Will. "Fred Lewis, of Stuart's cavalry?"

"That's who I am."

"Well, I am glad to see you, Fred."

"I am glad to see you. But how did you get into this scrape?"

"Carelessness on our part. We were out here to Stephen Warley's place and walked right into a trap."

In more explicit terms Will gave the story. Lewis listened with interest.

"All right," he said. "I am sorry we didn't get that Clements. He is a fox. But let them go. We must go on. Mount and ride along with us."

"I shall be pleased," replied Will.

On rode the detachment of cavalry. Soon they wound down through a ravine and then came to the flat country.

They were now following a road which Will knew would lead to Warley's. The boy captain wondered what had taken place there since he had left.

He wondered if the Grays had discovered his disappearance, and if so what had been done about it.

They had been absent from the plantation not yet an hour. Yet much could have taken place.

So along the road they galloped, and presently they came in sight of twinkling lights. Then a loud hail rang out: "Halt! Who goes there?"

The cavalcade drew rein. Lewis, who was in advance, accosted the picket.

"We are Confederates," he replied. "Are you the same?"

"Yes," replied the picket. "Have you the countersign?"

"No."

"Wait, then, and I will call the guard."

But Will now rode forward. He recognized the sentry's voice.

"Wilson, is that you?" he called. "It is all right! You know me!"

"Captain Prentiss!" cried the picket. "Bless my heart, sir! We have been looking everywhere for you and the lieutenant, sir!"

"Well, we have returned. Have you surrounded the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has the planter and his family left?"

"Oh, no, captain. They are yet here."

"Very good!" said Will, quietly. "Ride in, Lewis. You had better rest your horses awhile."

"I am sorry, Captain Prentiss," said the captain of the cavalry company, "but I have no time to lose. I have orders to tear up the railroad below here. It must be done before morning."

"Then you will not stop?"

"No."

"Very good. I wish you success."

"Thank ye! Good-night, Prentiss. Company, attention! Forward!"

The cavalry detachment galloped away. Will Prentiss quickly entered the lines and with Fred started for the house.

"Well," exclaimed the young lieutenant, "that was a close one for us, Will."

"So it was."

"But a miss is as good as a mile. I guess we'll live to fight a few more battles."

"I certainly hope so. We have had a charmed existence so far."

"So we have."

"I hope it will continue."

"So do I. Where shall we go? To the house to interview Warley?"

"Presently. Just now I want to report to Lieutenant Gray and see what has happened since we left."

So the two young officers entered the camp circle.

They were greeted with much enthusiasm by the Grays. Lieutenant Gray came up quickly.

"You said nothing to me about leaving camp, Captain Prentiss," he said. "I was a little worried about you."

"It was no fault of yours, Gray," replied Will. "We may thank our stars that we are safe here at present and not in the hands of the enemy."

This announcement surprised the second lieutenant.

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNEXPECTED VISIT.

"Why?" exclaimed Gray. "Do you mean to say that you have been in danger?"

"Danger?" replied Will. "We have been in the hands of the foe."

Then he told the story of their capture by Clements and of their providential rescue by Captain Lewis. The Grays were much astonished.

"And we were right within call all the while," cried one of the boys. "Oh, if we had only known it."

"I wish you had," declared Will. "It might have saved us a great deal of trouble."

Will found that the Grays were comfortably encamped. They had seen nothing of Warley or his people.

"Come on," said Fred to Will. "Let us go up and pay the old fellow a visit."

So the two boys walked up to the house. In a few moments they applied at the door. Lights shone in the great hall, and as the door opened Will and Fred saw the planter and his daughter by the great staircase.

The negro who admitted them turned to ask his master about it, but Stephen Warley stepped forward and said:

"It is all right. They are welcome. It is you, Captain Prentiss. Then you secured your liberty?"

"We were rescued," replied Will. "I want to say that Lieutenant Maynell has gone with Clements and Ross."

The planter's fair daughter, who was leaning upon the stair rail, came unsteadily forward. Her face was very pale.

"I knew that Lieutenant Maynell would do nothing dishonorable," she said. "He has had plenty of chances to break his parole, but he has refused to do so."

"The lieutenant is a square man," said Will. "We respect him deeply. But I think, sir, that as a Southern resident, in a State that has declared itself for the Confederacy, you have done wrong in harboring these Northern officers."

Stephen Warley's face was very pale. He made reply in a calm tone:

"My sympathies are with the North," he said. "I cannot believe in a division of the country. These men came here of their own free will, and not by invitation. If you will recall the fact, Lieutenant Maynell remained here as your prisoner."

"That is true."

"But I recognize well the fact that you are bound by your oath to destroy the enemies of the Confederacy. I maintain the position of a non-combatant. If you believe, though, that I have in any way conducted myself other than as neutral, do your duty, by all means. Destroy my home and imprison me, if you will. I will ask no mercy."

The old man spoke in even tones and in an impassioned way. Will felt the power of his argument.

"Mr. Warley," he said, "Lieutenant Maynell has left your house. In all good feeling I advise you to keep quiet. Make no demonstration of your Northern sympathies, and take care that Union officers or soldiers come here no more. I speak advisedly, for this region will soon be in the hands of our army. The tide is turning northward, and not until the Confederacy has gained its rights will it turn back."

"I fear you are too confident," said the planter. "The United States will surely win."

"It would be idle for us to discuss that," said Will.

"Captain Prentiss," said Kate, coming forward, "I want to thank you for your very great kindness and forbearance. We feel that we owe you much."

"Yes," said Stephen Warley. "We must express our deep gratitude to you, captain."

Will bowed and replied:

"There is but little obligation. I do not think that General Ewell himself would have done different. I feel sure that he has acted from misapprehension regarding you."

"It would seem so," replied Warley. "Though, I must confess that I strongly favor the North."

"Very well," said Will. "We shall ride away from here in the morning. I have given you good warning, and feel that I can do no more."

"We thank you, captain. Our house shall be your abode to-night if you desire."

Will hesitated a moment. Then he said:

"I am tempted to accept your kind offer for my lieutenant and myself."

"You are very welcome," said Warley. "I will send my servant for your effects."

"No," said Will. "You need not do that. We will come in later."

The two young officers took their leave. They went back and Will went the rounds of the picket line.

He was satisfied that all was well.

There was little danger of attack that night. In the morning he would ride back and report to General Ewell.

The two young officers very quickly made the rounds and then prepared to return to the house. It was such a treat to sleep in a bed instead of upon the ground that they did not wish to lose the opportunity.

So they took their effects and started for the house. Kate was at the piano when they entered, and her wonderful voice was at its best.

The boys spent a pleasant evening with the planter and his daughter. They had finally, near the midnight hour, started to retire, when a startling thing happened.

There was a click of horses' hoofs on the gravel outside, the rattle of arms, and an uproar of voices.

In an instant Will and Fred started up in alarm.

Their first thought was that they had been attacked by the enemy. But the next moment Orderly Sergeant Joe Spotswood burst into the hall.

"Captain Prentiss!" he said, saluting.

"Well?" asked Will.

"General Ewell has arrived, sir, with a number of his staff. He is coming to the house."

For one moment Will's knees grew weak beneath him. It was an astounding report.

Warley turned white as a ghost. Kate clasped her hands over the half-healed wound in her side.

"Ewell!" exclaimed the planter. "We are lost. He will not spare me."

"Have courage!" said Will, quietly. "We will do our best. I think that I can convince him."

Spotswood had stood all the while at attention. But now into the hall burst another of the Grays.

It was Corporal Sam Payton.

"Captain Prentiss," he said, "General Ewell has arrived. He is outside and has called for you."

Will turned and bowed to Warley and to Kate.

"Have no fear," he said. "I shall plead your cause."

The young captain left the house. He saw a troop of horse in the light of the camp fires.

Standing by one of the fires was General Ewell. Members of his staff surrounded him. Will walked boldly up and saluted.

"Ah, here he is!" cried the great Confederate general. "Prentiss, what are you doing here?"

"General Ewell," replied Will, "we have scouted through the country about here, and, with men and horses exhausted, we have bivouacked here. I intended in the morning to return and report to you."

"Very good. Is not this the residence of that traitor, Stephen Warley?"

"Mr. Warley lives here."

General Ewell's face clouded angrily. He took a step forward.

"What were my orders to you when I sent you up into this country?"

"Your orders, sir, were to burn this house and turn Warley out of doors."

"Very good, sir. Why have you not done it? Does it mean that you have disobeyed?"

"General Ewell, I found that it would be for the present greatly to my advantage to retain this place as a headquarters or rendezvous. Now, far from disobeying your orders intentionally, I have allowed discretion and the emergencies of the moment to influence me in what I deemed a better course."

"Your answer is very ambiguous," said Ewell. "A soldier knows only implicit obedience of orders. It is not for him to reason why."

Will bowed low.

"Very well, General Ewell," he said, "I may as well tell you, then, that I cannot see the justice of destroying this beautiful mansion to spite its owner, who, so far as I can learn, is a non-combatant, and has done no harm."

It was a bold reply. For a moment General Ewell quivered with rage. Why he restrained himself it was not easy to say.

"Prentiss," he said, in a hard tone, "you have surprised and pained me. I have known you as a faithful officer, and this is the first time I have known of an evasion of duty."

For some moments there was silence. Will Prentiss felt a strange heartsickness. He knew his offense was almost an unpardonable one, in a military sense.

It might be that he would face a court-martial for insubordination. He might even be discharged from the service.

But he had followed his convictions of right. He could do no more.

General Ewell turned to one of his aides.

"Go into the house and tell the man who lives there to come out here. I want to see him," he said.

The aide departed. In a few moments two figures came down the steps. They walked into the circle of firelight.

They were Stephen Warley and his fair daughter. Kate leaned heavily upon her father's arm.

They stood before General Ewell in the firelight. He looked at them a moment penetratingly.

"You are Stephen Warley?" he asked.

"I am!" replied the planter.

"Born in Virginia?"

"Yes."

"Do you not favor the Yankees?"

"I favor the Union of the States. I believe our present form of government should be perpetuated," replied Warley.

"Yes! You have in various ways aided the Yankee army. You have sent spies into our camp and carried the word to the Union commander-in-chief."

Stephen Warley straightened up.

"No!" he replied, with a ringing voice. "That is wholly false!"

"You deny it?"

"I do, with all my soul. I have never acted as a spy, nor harbored a spy in my house. I give you my oath on that."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SCOUT'S STORY.

Stephen Warley's words and manner were so forceful and convincing that the Confederate general was impressed.

"If I was sure that was true," he said, "I might be inclined to favor you."

"It is true."

"But—I have been informed positively that you have acted as a spy for the United States army."

"You have been wrongly informed, sir. It cannot be proved against me."

"You have harbored Union officers in your house?"

"I have also had as guests Confederate officers," replied Warley. "I trust you will not condemn Captain Prentiss for his generous treatment of me. He was actuated by the fact that I am an old man, and this is my home. To destroy it would avail little good for the Confederacy, and it would be a great loss to me. Not in any sense would it change my views. I would rather you would punish me in some other way."

General Ewell turned to Will.

"I can understand," he said, grimly. "The old fellow has almost converted me. But sentiment must not displace duty. There are too many men of this fellow's stamp in the South to-day. We need patriots, not traitors. To make an example of one may have a salutary effect upon others."

The boy captain made no reply. The most profound dismay had seized upon him.

General Ewell turned to Warley.

"You are given an hour to get your effects out of that house," he said. "At the expiration of that time the fire brand will be applied."

Warley's face flushed.

"Very well, sir," he said, quietly. "I can only say that this is the worst outrage of the war."

But General Ewell turned his back and walked away. As he did so he beckoned Will to follow him.

Warley and his daughter turned back to the house. It is hardly necessary to say that their hearts were sad.

Will followed General Ewell. The Confederate commander paused some yards away and said, brusquely:

"Have you been beyond this point with your men, Prentiss?"

"I have not, sir," replied Will.

"Then you do not know what is to the east of our position?"

"Scouts have brought me word that all Union troops have retired toward Manassas."

"Ah, I see! There will be another battle fought at Bull Run. Mark my word on that. The tide has turned northward. This time we shall go into Washington triumphant."

"I hope so, general."

"Now, to return to another subject. What do you know about these Warleys?"

Will was surprised.

"Very little, sir. I never met them before coming here. But I believe that they are excellent people."

"He is a traitor!"

"I don't think we can hardly say that, sir. He sympathizes with the North, but I cannot believe that he is a spy."

"That is your candid opinion?"

"Yes."

"Well, Prentiss, you know as well as I that the Confederacy cannot harbor those within its borders who are not true to its principles. It has been my intention to destroy the house of this traitor. But I do not mean to be hard of heart or uncharitable. No man will do more for deserving charity. But I am going to leave this matter in your hands. You know that this man is in a position to do our cause a great deal of harm."

"He lives among us, and has intercourse with the Northerners. His daughter's lover is a lieutenant in Pope's army. Now, if he will depart for the North and remain there until after the war, I will spare his house."

Will's face grew bright.

"That would seem a much fairer way, general," he said. "I have no doubt he will be very grateful and exceedingly glad to accept your terms."

"Very good. You will convey them to him in the morning. I shall ride now to headquarters."

"Have you orders for me, sir? Shall I remain here?"

"Yes, for the present," replied Ewell. "I am going to

extend my lines to this point. If you are attacked here I will send you reinforcements."

With this General Ewell called for his horse. A few minutes later, with his bodyguard, he rode away into the night.

Will Prentiss was in a much relieved frame of mind. He at once walked up to the house. He found Mr. Warley and Kate in a much disturbed state.

They were trying to collect such valuables as they wanted to save. Kate was in tears.

"Mr. Warley," said Will, as he entered, "stop where you are. General Ewell has gone."

"Gone?" exclaimed father and daughter.

"Yes, and I have good news for you. He has left all in my hands. I am able to save your home for you."

A joyous cry escaped Kate.

"Oh, Captain Prentiss," she cried, "is that true? We owe you so much."

"I may say that it is true; but there is a condition."

"What?"

"You are to go North and remain until after the war."

For a moment there was silence. Then Stephen Warley said:

"Is that General Ewell's ultimatum?"

"It is."

"Very well! I shall accept it. But I much fear that, left to the mercies of the bands of raiders and guerillas which infest this region, I shall find little left of my house after the war."

"Is there no one you can leave here to care for it safely?" asked Will.

"Only our colored servants, and they are not to be depended upon, now that the cry of freedom has turned their heads."

"Well," said Will, "the chance is worth something. It is better than having your home burned before your eyes."

"That is true," agreed the planter. "Of course, we shall accept the terms and start at once for the North. Can you get ready at once, Kate?"

The young girl sank into a chair.

"Yes," she replied, weakly. But Will saw that she was very pale. The terrible mental strain, added to the physical suffering from her wound was telling upon her.

"It is too bad," he said. "I don't believe you are able to make the journey, Miss Warley."

"If it must be, I can do it," said the young girl. "But where shall we go, papa? To Philadelphia?"

"Yes," replied the planter. "I think that is our best plan."

Will now left them to decide upon their own plans. The young captain felt that he could do no more.

Other matters connected with the duties of the campaign now claimed his attention.

The Grays were in bivouac about the Warley house. Many of them were rolled up in their blankets asleep.

Will was quite fatigued himself, and felt the need of rest. He selected a place near one of the camp fires, and, rolling himself up in his blanket, was soon asleep.

Will was awakened by a touch on his arm. He looked up and rubbed his eyes to see more clearly.

In the early morning light he saw the face of Fred Randolph. The young lieutenant betrayed alarm.

"I think you had better get up, captain," he said. "Scouts have just brought in word of a force moving along the railroad a mile below here."

"The enemy?" exclaimed Will.

"Yes; the scout, Robinson, is here now. He can give you the details."

Will sat up and collected his thoughts. He had slept soundly, and for a time he was not able to think clearly.

Moreover, he ached in his bones, the sign of a possible attack of ague. But he finally got upon his feet and was quickly himself again.

Robinson, the scout, stood near by.

He was a broad-shouldered fellow, with heavy features, cunning eyes, and a generally alert manner.

He saluted, and asked:

"Captain Prentiss?"

"Yes," replied Will.

"I have to report, sir, that a large force of Union cavalry or guerillas are at this moment crossing the railroad a mile below here. It is possible that they mean to cut off some train bearing supplies for Jackson and Ewell."

"Ah!" said Will, quickly. "We will try and spoil their game. Lieutenant Randolph, mount the company and prepare to ride thither and investigate."

"All right, Captain Prentiss."

In a few moments the word went through the camp, and the boys turned out with alacrity. In a short space of time they were mounted and ready for a change of base.

Will swung into his saddle and led the way. Soon they were on the highway and leaving the Warley mansion behind.

Will learned in after years that Stephen Warley had proceeded to Philadelphia with his daughter. There Lieutenant Maynell, who had obtained a furlough, rejoined them, and a wedding followed.

In after years they returned to the old plantation, where doubtless, they are living happily at the present day.

So ended the little romance, so far as Will Prentiss and his Grays were concerned. The boy captain never regretted the action he had taken in saving the fine old manor house from the flames.

The Grays rode on rapidly, and soon came in sight of the railroad.

They now deployed and proceeded cautiously. In the morning light they soon saw that the scout Robinson had brought the truth.

In a little cut through which the railroad passed the Union troops had taken up their position. Their horses were corraled in a field a few hundred yards back of their position.

Cautiously the Grays reconnoitered the position. It resulted in a decision by Will which the others endorsed.

"There is no doubt they are waiting for the supply train," he said. "You can see that they have torn up the

rails. Now, of course, they outnumber us, and to attack them on even terms might be foolish. I think, though, that we can deal them a blow that will tell, if we act quickly."

"What is that?" asked Fred.

"My idea is to make a swift dash in the cover of yonder pines. We will swoop down between them and their horses. We can beat back the guards and, I believe, capture every animal."

It was a thrilling proposition. The Grays felt like cheering, but this would not have been safe.

Plans were quickly made for the enactment of the daring plan. The Grays, in a deployed line, slowly advanced in the cover of the pines.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIGHT AT THE RAILROAD CUT.

Will Prentiss knew that for his plan to succeed he must move with great caution. If he was seen by a picket or guard all would be lost.

But he advanced slowly. The scout Robinson went ahead and located the picket line.

It was the purpose of the Grays to make a swift dash through this line. Once between the horses and the railroad they could quickly break the fence and run the horses off in Indian fashion.

So the Grays slowly marched down in the shelter of the pines. At last they halted as near the foe as they dared to go.

They could see the pickets walking their beats a little distance below. The supreme moment had come.

Will carefully calculated his chances. He saw the Union line of cavalymen in the railroad cut. He saw the open space between them and their horses.

This must be crossed by the Grays.

Of course, they would get a scattering fire from the Union soldiers, but this Will hoped would be brief.

All were now on the qui vive! One minute the Grays and their horses waited in the edge of the line of pines.

Then Will heard a shot. He saw a Union guard running as fast as his legs could carry him toward the cut.

He knew that their presence would be quickly known to the Union defenders. There was no time to lose.

At once the young captain leaped forward in his saddle.

"Ready, Grays! By the right flank! Forward! Gallop!"

Down went the little troop. A moment more, and they had reached the rail fence. The pickets fired and fled.

Then Will saw the line of blue come surging up over the cut. Shots were heard, and bullets came zipping across the open.

But several of the dismounted Grays had hurled the rails from the fence. Into the enclosure rode the Grays.

On the other side a detachment, sent around for that purpose, had made a passage through the fence.

Toward this the horses were driven, the Grays shouting like mad. Like a flash the frightened steeds dashed out of the enclosure and away into the highway.

After them went the Grays, like a troop of wild Indians. But in the highway they called a halt.

"Enough for that," Will cried. "We will pick up the animals later. We must ride up the track and warn the supply train."

So the Grays wheeled now and rode toward the railroad. They were just beyond musket shot, and the infuriated Union raiders could not reach them.

They were, indeed, in a bad position now, without their horses. Just then Fred, who rode beside Will, cried:

"Hello! Did you hear that?"

Will did hear the sound to which the young lieutenant alluded. It was a distant locomotive whistle.

The train was coming.

The raiders had turned back to the track. Will saw that the Grays could not hope to stop the train.

It was already in sight and coming at full speed. Not until it rounded a curve did the engineer see the danger ahead.

He at once set his brakes, but it was too late to stop the train in season for it to back out of danger. It came to a stop right in the cut.

In a moment the raiders were aboard. They made prisoners of the train hands in a twinkling. There were fully twenty cars filled with provisions for the Confederate army.

Will saw that something desperate must be done if these were to be saved.

The Grays were no match for the foe in point of numbers. But this did not deter the boy captain from making an attack.

The little troop rode down near enough to open fire on the raiders.

For some moments the latter were too busy with their captured prize to respond. But finally, when men began to fall rapidly, the Union colonel turned his attention to the Grays.

"By jingo, Will!" cried Fred. "They are making a move for us! They are five to one against us."

"Nevertheless," replied the boy captain, "we must drive them back. Those supplies must be saved."

"I wish we could get reinforcements."

"There is no time for that now."

"That is true."

There was surely no way but to fight it out on their own hook. The Grays kept up a hot fire.

But it was seen now that their efforts alone would not avail to save the train.

On board the train were kegs of powder. Some of these had been placed under the cars and a line of fuse placed.

The train was doomed.

"Too late!" cried Joe Spotswood. "Confound them! I've no doubt Jackson needs all the stuff badly."

"Indeed he does!" declared Will Prentiss, with a pang of disappointment. "They have the best of us. We got their horses, but they got the train."

Now the Union cavalry could be seen advancing rapidly to attack the Grays. Only a few remained in the cut, and they were now seen to run.

For the fuse had been fired.

A spluttering line of fire ran along the rails. There was one brief instant of suspense when that line of flame vanished under the cars.

Then there was a terrific roar, which shook the earth. Into the air rose sections of the train and debris.

When the smoke had cleared the train had vanished. In its place was a smouldering heap of ruin.

The sight angered the Grays and made them all the more determined to avenge the affair.

Will quickly lined his men up by a bridge which crossed the track. They kept up their fire on the advancing foe.

But it was soon patent to the astute young captain that it was madness to attempt to hold the foe back.

He would lose too many men. In fact, there was a likelihood of annihilation.

"I guess we've got to fall back, Will," said Fred.

"Yes," said the boy captain. "We will devote our time now to rounding up their horses."

So the Grays, with a defiant yell, fired a last volley and rode away. The Union raiders were left angry and disappointed at being unable to pursue.

The Grays soon overtook the horses of the raiders.

These were picked up, one by one, and driven ahead. They were, in the main, a fine lot of animals.

"Well, there is a little recompense," said Will. "We lost the train, but here is several thousand dollars' worth of valuable horseflesh. I know General Ewell will be glad to see them."

Thus the Grays drove the horses along the highway. They knew that they ought soon to reach the right flank of General Ewell's line.

For some time they kept on thus along the highway. Then suddenly a loud series of yells reached the ears of the Grays.

From a hillside on their left they had come. A glance showed them a line of gray extending around the hillside.

The Grays at once drew rein.

Down the hill galloped a colonel and his aides. He appeared in the road before the Grays and saluted.

At once Will recognized him.

"Colonel English," he cried, "this is a great pleasure! I have not seen you since the fight at Cedar Mountain."

"Glad to see you, Prentiss! But what have you got here? Been out on a raid, have you?"

"We captured these from a regiment of Union cavalry," replied Will.

With this he told the story of the fight at the railroad cut and the destruction of the train.

Colonel English was dumbfounded.

"That is bad news," he declared. "That train had supplies for this wing of Jackson's army. It looks as if they were lost now."

"I am afraid they are," said Will; "but we were unable to save them."

"You certainly did well to capture their horses. They will come in good service, I can tell you. I have been wanting mounts for one of my companies. They will give me a chance to do a little raiding also."

"Is the foe close at hand?"

"I think so. We have been ordered to hold this hill against an expected attack. But the enemy has not yet appeared."

"Well," said Will, "my boys have had a hard ride, and some of them are wounded. With your permission, we will bivouac here with you."

"I shall be glad to have you," said English. "Then, when they are made comfortable, come up to my tent. I want to have a talk with you."

"I will do so."

The Grays were only too glad to pull up their horses and dismount. The captured horses were taken in charge by the cavalry division.

When the Grays were made comfortable and Will had obtained an order upon the commissary for rations, the young captain started for Colonel English's tent.

When he reached there he met the colonel just dismounting from his horse.

"Ah, Prentiss," he said. "You have come in the nick of time. I was just going to send for you. I want to see you very much."

"I am at your service, colonel," replied the boy captain.

"Come right in."

Will followed the colonel into the tent. The latter lit a cigar, and then said:

"Prentiss, I have a very odd communication here. I thought perhaps you could help me to unravel it."

With this he handed Will a bit of linen cloth. It looked like a strip torn from a handkerchief.

On it was traced in irregular characters in red, apparently blood, the following startling words:

"Captured by Bill Reddy, guerilla. Have valuable despatches from Lee to Ewell. Take this to Colonel English. Ask him to hand to Will Prentiss, Virginia Grays. Find despatches, hollow tree by White's bridge, on Black Creek. Hope to escape. Rescue me if you can. (Signed) N. P."

Will Prentiss read the startling communication with amazement. For a moment he was dumbfounded.

Then he managed to ask:

"Colonel English, where did you get this?"

"That is the strange thing about it," said the colonel.

"A negro wench brought it to our picket guard at Post Ten. Unfortunately, the picket allowed the negress to depart. I knew you would be interested, as your name is mentioned."

"Certainly. What do you make of it?"

"Well, it looks as if some despatch bearer had been captured by Bill Reddy, the Union guerilla. Lacking paper and ink, he has opened a vein and used his blood and perhaps the point of a pin, to write the note."

"Where is White's bridge?"

"It crosses Black Creek two miles below here. It is a brawling stream with wooded slopes on either side, and just the place for guerillas to rendezvous."

CHAPTER XIV.

ON A DARING MISSION.

It is hardly necessary to say that Will Prentiss was intensely interested.

He studied the note carefully.

"It is evidently some one who knows me," he said. "I wonder who it can be? Why didn't he sign his full name. The initials are N. P. Let me see! I——"

Will came to a stop.

In an instant his face grew white. A gasping cry escaped him.

"Eh?" exclaimed Colonel English. "What is the matter?"

"My soul! Do you know who wrote this message, Colonel English? It is my sister, Nell Prentiss."

Colonel English turned like a flash.

"Eh?" he exclaimed, "your sister Nell?"

"Yes! You know she has been in the service as a spy since the war began. It is certainly Nell!"

Colonel English took a step nearer.

"On my word, Prentiss, I believe you are right," he said. "She is in bad hands, also; that Reddy is a villain."

Will started for the door of the tent.

"Not one moment must be lost," he declared. "I must go to her rescue at once. If Bill Reddy is to be found on this earth, I must find him."

"Wait a moment, Will."

"Well?"

"I don't believe anything will be gained by precipitate action. Reddy will elude you with ease if you go after him with your company of Grays."

"What else can I do?"

"I think there is another and better plan. You and I will ride down and get those despatches first. We will see that they are sent to their destination."

"Well?"

"Then we will don a disguise. Let you make up for a farmer. I will be another. Do you understand?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, I will make it clear to you," said Colonel English. "I want to tell you that I have long had a trap on foot to capture Bill Reddy. It is a job that cannot be executed except by strategy."

"Ah, I see."

"Now, my best scout, Walton, has told me that Reddy has a sweetheart. Her name's Celia Burdell. She is the daughter of Wallace Burdell, who lives out on the White Creek road. I know the place well. Burdell has a brother in Richmond whom I know. They are all Union sympathizers. We will beg their hospitality for one night. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Now, Reddy is almost sure to turn up there after dark. We will wait until he has taken his leave, and then follow him. Once he is in our hands he will give up his prisoner to save his life."

Will Prentiss was deeply impressed with this daring and clever plan.

"I don't believe there is any other way to rescue your sister," the colonel said.

"We will adopt your plan," said Will. "And I am deeply indebted to you for your kind interest, Colonel English. Let us waste no time."

"My horse is ready. As soon as you get yours we will start."

It did not take Will long to go back to his camp and get his horse. In a few moments he was back at Colonel English's tent.

The Colonel bound a huge bundle on the back of his saddle.

"Our disguise," he said. "I have everything that is necessary."

They galloped away and were soon behind the picket line. Colonel English led the way, and it was not long before they were on the Black Creek road.

The two miles were quickly covered, though they proceeded with caution. There was a possibility of encountering some stray detachment of the foe.

But they finally reached the bridge over the creek. Here Colonel English dismounted.

They tethered their horses deep in the woods. Then they began a search for the hollow tree. It was soon found.

English reached his hand in and drew out the papers. He scanned them in a quick manner, and said:

"It is too late. They are of no importance now, so I don't think it will be necessary to forward them. We will now go up to Burton's house."

"As we are?" asked Will.

"Oh, no; by no means!" replied the colonel. "We will be two different looking men when we reach there."

The colonel now produced his articles of disguise.

Very quickly they exchanged their uniforms for the rough garb of the farmer. Then, with wigs and the skillful use of cosmetics, English made a complete change in their appearance.

"Now," said the colonel, by way of warning, "I want you to remember the peculiar talk of the farmers hereabouts. You are Jim Swain and I am Caleb Little. Do you see?"

"All right," said Will. "I am agreeable."

They now took leave of their horses. In a few moments they were following a path which led to the north.

It was not long before this led them into a sort of clearing of perhaps fifty or more acres. They saw the great farm house in its center.

"That is the place," said English. "The next thing is to look out for the dogs."

And these did come trooping out—great hounds with savage jaws. But at their heels came the owner himself.

He called them back and then stared at the two strangers.

"Howdy, stranger!" cried Colonel English, with an offhand gesture. "I'm glad to see you. We're off our trail, I reckon. Kin you tell us whar we are?"

"I reckon I kin," replied the farmer, shifting his quid of tobacco. "Ye're in the State of Virginny."

"Really!" said English, with a laugh. "Will ye tell me whar ther brother of Bill Burdell lives?"

The effect upon the farmer was wonderful. He started forward eagerly. There was no reserve in his manner now.

"I'm Bill's brother!" he cried. "Do you know Bill? Wall, you bet his friends are my friends. Who are ye?"

"Wall, I'm Caleb Little, and this here is my friend Jim Swain. Bill told us to look you up if we came out this way."

The farmer was exuberant. He welcomed them with much pleasure.

"How's Bill doin'?" he asked.

"Fust-rate."

"You come right tew ther house, an' my wife an' darter will git you suthin' tew eat. I've got some durned good corn whisky, tew, right from ther still."

"Good fer you!" cried English. "Cum on, Jim. This man is jest what Bill said he was."

"You bet, I'm Bill's brother!" cried Burdell. "Anything I've got is yours. Cum right on up tew ther house."

It is hardly necessary to say that Will and Colonel English did not refuse. They found that Burdell's wife was a buxom daughter of Virginia, and the girl Celia had the soft eyes and fair skin of the Southern temperament.

The two visitors were made welcome in the most hospitable manner.

The table was spread, and the good wife set a splendid meal before them. It is needless to say that they willingly partook of it.

The girl Celia, however, seemed to regard them in a curious way. Will noticed this first, and he was inclined to regard it as distrust.

He communicated this fact to English in an aside.

"Perhaps so," whispered the colonel. "But you can't tell. She is a little shy and indifferent."

"There's another queer thing!"

"What?"

"Do you notice that door over there?"

"Yes."

The door alluded to seemed to communicate with an inner room. It was tightly closed.

"Well, I think there is something behind that door they are guarding. I notice that one of them sits close by it most of the time."

In their conversation Will and the colonel were careful to exhibit their pro-Union feelings. This, more than anything else, seemed to win the confidence of these country people.

Finally, after an attempt to engage Celia in conversation, Will said:

"I reckon as how you'd be a durned fine dancer, Miss Celia. If thar's a dance anywhar nigh here to-night I'd like fer tew take yew tew it."

"I kain't promise fer ter go' nowheres to-night," said the rustic belle.

"No," put in the mother. "Celia's bein' waited upon by a young man. He'll be around this evenin'."

"I'm sorry," drawled Will. "Never did hev no luck with ther gals, nohow."

"Mebbe if she didn't expect him to-night like enuff she'd go with ye. Eh, Celia?"

"I reckon as mebbe I would," blushed Celia. "But he's jealous."

"I ain't goin' fer to make no move ter cut no one out," said Will. "Mebbe I kin dance at yer weddin'?"

"Mebbe ye kin," said Celia, demurely.

But just at that moment a step outside drew all eyes to the door. There stepped into the room a young man, dressed in a semi-uniform of blue. His face was marked with a scar, and fierce mustaches curled from his upper lip.

With a joyful cry Celia sprang up.

"It's Bill!" she cried. "I'm glad ye've comè, Bill!"

But the Union guerilla put her aside with a sweep of his arm. His brow clouded at sight of Will and Colonel English.

His gaze seemed to pierce them, and he demanded:

"Who be these strangers?"

"They be friends of Bill's down ter Richmond," cried Burdell. "I'll make ye acquainted with Mr. Reddy, gentlemen."

"We're glad ter know ye," said Colonel English, rising and holding out his hand. But Reddy passed them with a scowl.

He strode to the door of the inner room and seemed about to open it, but he checked himself.

"Is everything all right?" he demanded of Burdell.

"Yas," replied the farmer.

Reddy now turned and ungraciously addressed the two visitors.

"Be ye travelin'?" he asked.

"Thet's what we are doin'," replied English.

"Ye're a good ways from Richmond."

"I'd hate ter walk back."

"I reckon ye would. Are ye in ther service?"

"Not exactly," replied Colonel English. "But we sees things as we goes along."

Reddy's suspicion seemed to be lessening. But he resumed:

"Goin' on yer way soon?"

"In an hour or so."

This reply seemed to allay the suspicions of the guerilla. He gave Celia a comprehensive look, and both passed out of the house to the garden.

It was doubtless their purpose to withdraw for love-making. Will and the colonel exchanged glances.

CHAPTER XV.

WHICH IS THE END.

Burdell lit his pipe in a satisfied manner, while Mrs. Burdell began to clear off the table.

Colonel English arose and said:

"I say, Burdell, I'm goin' out an' take a look aroun' ther place hyar, if ye don't object."

"Not a bit," replied the farmer. "I'll jine ye pooty quick."

The colonel and Will went out by the front way. Reddy and his sweetheart were at the rear of the house.

"Well," whispered Will, "what do you think of it, colonel?"

"The game is ours."

"Do you believe it?"

"Yes."

"That inner room—do you think——"

"I think your sister Nell is in that inner room. That's all right. There are but two of us. My purpose in coming out here was to make sure that Reddy had no others with him."

"I guessed as much."

"It looks as if he came alone."

"I believe he did."

"Then the game is ours. Here comes Burdell now."

The farmer lounged out of the house.

"My wife says fer me ter git out," he said. "Ther house ain't no place fer men folks, nohow. Come down hyar an' see my pigs."

"With pleasure," replied the colonel. "I suppose ye have pooty good luck, don't ye, raisin' of 'em?"

"Yas, fair ter middlin'."

The farmer led the way into a pine grove a little distance from the house. Here a large pen contained a dozen porkers.

The colonel had given Will the tip, and now, as they reached the pen, he stepped up behind Burdell and said, in a sharp voice:

"My friend, one whimper from your lips and you die! Hands up!"

The farmer turned and looked into the muzzle of a pistol. Every bit of color faded from his face.

Terror and chagrin unspeakable showed in his eyes. He stared at the two Confederates dumb and aghast.

"Saints an' sinners!" he hoarsely gasped. "Who be ye?"

"Silence," said the colonel. "Tie him up, Will. Gag him well."

It was but the work of a few moments for Will Prentiss to execute this order.

Burdell was bound hand and foot and then gagged. He was left lying beside the pig pen.

"Well," said Will, with a smile, "it looks propitious so far, colonel."

"So it does! Now for Reddy!"

Quickly they turned their footsteps back toward the

farm house. As they approached they saw Mrs. Burdell at her work.

They did not trouble her.

They rounded the house and entered the garden. Reddy and the girl Celia sat upon a rude bench under a tree.

Their backs were to the two officers, who stepped lightly up behind them. The colonel placed the muzzle of his pistol to Reddy's ear, and said:

"It's all up! You are a prisoner!"

With a bound, the guerilla leader was upon his feet. But he looked into the pistol muzzle.

For a moment he seemed tempted to make trouble. But he saw the hopelessness of this, and exclaimed:

"Ye've got me, confound ye! I suspected ye when I fust see ye!"

Celia had sprung up with a scream. Mrs. Burdell heard this and came running out. She went back and reappeared with a shotgun.

But Will walked up to her and said:

"If you attempt to use that my comrade will shoot Reddy dead. You will then pay the penalty."

"Confound ye!" gritted the woman. "I don't see how ye fooled Burdell so well!"

"It's all right, madam," said the colonel. "Don't feel bad over a little matter like this. Of course it's unfortunate; but such are the fortunes of war."

Celia was weeping, and the mother now went to her side.

In a few moments Reddy was bound securely. Then, leaving the colonel to watch him, Will entered the house.

As he did so he raised his voice:

"Nell! Are you here, sister mine?"

A stifled cry came from the inner room. Will kicked the door open, and the next moment Nell Prentiss bounded into his arms.

The girl spy was pale, but her courage had not deserted her.

"I knew you would come, Will!" she cried.

"Certainly I would come!" cried the boy captain. "But you gave me an awful scare, Nell. I thought I would never be able to find you."

"Is Colonel English with you?"

"Yes."

"And you came here without your men?"

"We did."

"Ah, that is risky. The guerilla Reddy comes here and——"

"He is our prisoner!"

Nell opened her eyes in amazement.

"You have captured him?"

"Yes. He is under Colonel English's care now. We shall take him to camp and send him to Richmond."

A footstep sounded in their rear. The woman, Mrs. Burdell, and her daughter Celia, clinging to her arm, stood before Will.

Their manner was that of abject grief and despair.

"Oh, sir," cried the woman, "I hopes ye won't refuse our prayers! Don't take Reddy away with ye! It'll break

my gal's heart. I beg ye not to do it. We'll do anythin' for ye if ye won't."

Will Prentiss looked into the pleading face of the young girl, and his nerve was shaken. His disposition to do no one harm was very strong.

To him it was a little romance which it seemed sad to break. Nell seemed to read her brother's mind, for she said:

"He has been a thorn in the side of our generals, Will. But perhaps he would give his parole——"

"Yas, oh, yas!" fairly screamed Mrs. Burdell. "He'll give his word never to fight agin ther Confederacy agin."

"We will go out and see him," said Will.

Colonel English was at first much opposed to the plan.

"These fellows of his class think nothing of breaking a parole," he said. "You cannot trust them."

At this Reddy's head went up proudly. His eyes flashed fire.

"Take me along, if ye will! Hang me to ther fust tree! I never broke my word in my life, an' I'd never give it to ye now, only for ther little gal here, who is so much ter me thet I'm willin' ter give up my commission an' quit the war fer good!"

Will Prentiss turned to Colonel English. They exchanged glances. Then the boy captain said:

"Mrs. Burdell, go down there by the pig pen and release your husband. Miss Celia, it is your pretty face and true heart that wins this time. We'll take your parole, Reddy, and I believe you'll keep it."

And, so far as Will Prentiss was able to discover, he kept it. Will, with his sister Nell and Colonel English, returned to camp. A few hours later orders came to move northward, and that great march into Maryland was begun.

What incidents befell Will Prentiss and his Grays during that famous sortie of Lee and his army we must leave to a future story.

THE END.

Read "UP THE YAZOO; OR, THE BOYS IN BLUE WITH SHERMAN," which will be the next number (29) of "Blue and Gray Weekly."

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